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250

the un-Americans

by Alvah Bessie

THE HEART OF SPAIN (editor)

BREAD & A STONE

MEN IN BATTLE

DWELL IN THE WILDERNESS

THE *FREE* WORLD (in preparation)

Alvah Bessie

the un-Americans

"Stand your ground. Don't fire unless fired upon; but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here."

CAPTAIN JOHN PARKER
Lexington, Mass.
April 19, 1775

CAMERON ASSOCIATES, INC., NEW YORK 1957

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First edition

"Liberty is meaningless where the right to utter one's thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist. That, of all rights, is the dread of tyrants. It is the right which they first of all strike down. They know its power."

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To the Memory of

Aaron Lopoff

who died in the first battle

(Sierra Pandols, Catalonia, 17 August 1938)

Joe Hecht

who died in the last (?)

(Saarlautern, Germany, 18 March 1945)

"What's past is prologue"

1. The Committee

"Any fascist attempt to gain power in America would not use the exact Hitler pattern. It would work under the guise of 'super-patriotism' and 'super-Americanism.' Fascist leaders are neither stupid nor naive. They know that they must hand out a line that 'sells.' . . ."

U.S. War Department, *Army Talk;*
Orientation Fact Sheet No. 64 (24 March 1945)

1

Subversive And Un-American Propaganda Activities In The United States
EXECUTIVE SESSION

November 7, 1947

If the witness will please identify himself?

Francis X. Lang, 1 University Place, New York City.

X? What is that name?

Xavier. My friends call me Zav.

Z...a...v...

No, X. I was named after the rather celebrated Spanish Jesuit missionary of the sixteenth century, Francisco Javier...

I see. Where and when were you born, Mr. Lang?

As a matter of fact, this is my birthday. November 7, 1900. I anticipated the Russian Revolution by seventeen years...

I didn't get that, I'm sorry.

Skip it, it was a joke.

Are you under the impression that this is a joke, Mr. Lang?

I'm sorry. Do you want anything more?

A brief background of your education and training, if you please.

Parochial and high school, Seattle. University of Washington. Bachelor degree, 1920. Copy boy on the P. I....

P. I.?

Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Belongs to Hearst. Promoted to reporter; police beat. How much of this do you want?

You are the playwright, Francis Lang?

The same. Though I've had no plays produced since 1945. There seems to be no market for poetic drama.

Would you name some of the plays you have written?

I'm amazed that anyone would be interested.

Name them please. Just a moment, Mr. Lang, you are here under subpoena, are you not?

I am. For what reason I cannot conceive.

You will find out in time, sir. This is a committee of the United States Congress. It is charged with investigating into the origin and extent of subversive and un-American propaganda disseminated in our country...

That's why I said I couldn't conceive why you would be interested in anything I've written.

Would you name some of your plays, please?

Certainly. My first play was called The War Of The Roses. *Most of my plays are in verse, blank verse with occasional rhymed passages. Since the Elizabethan era no one has been much interested in the form except Maxwell Anderson and myself.*

War of the Roses?

It was a civil war that took place in England in the fifteenth century, Congressman, I'm sure you recall. Sort of a struggle for the crown between the House of York, whose emblem was a white rose, and the House of Lancaster, symbolized by a red rose—somewhat subversive, I guess—resulting in the...

Mr. Lang. Your attitude seems facetious, if you don't mind my saying so. I'm aware, and the other committee members are aware, that you are a famous and successful man, internationally famous, but that does not give you any more rights before this committee than any other American citizen called...

I'm sorry, I...

Please don't interrupt...

If I may, Mr. Chairman...

You don't interrupt me either, Mr. Investigator. Mr. Lang, you were called before this committee because we have information which leads us to believe that you have some knowledge of subversive and Commonist propaganda...

I'm sorry, sir, but I have no knowledge of Communist or any other kind of propaganda, and that's why...

I must ask you to subside, Mr. Lang. The committee counsel will ask you certain questions. You will please give a responsive answer. You are under oath; I believe you took an oath. You just testified that your early training was in the Catholic faith, so I take it you have some respect for an oath...

I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to be facetious. If I may, I am at a total loss to understand why I have been subpoenaed. After The War Of The Roses, *produced shortly after I left college, I went abroad, in* 1924 *I believe it was, on a Guggenheim Fellowship, creative writing fellowship, and in Paris I wrote another play, which laid an egg there. It was about Jeanne d'Arc, and it was probably presumptuous of me. Anyhow, in* 1928 *I had another play produced*

that ran six weeks in New York; the critics liked it but the public sat on its hands or rather kept its hands in its pockets and didn't buy tickets. It was called...

That will be all right, Mr. Lang. Did you also write a play about the civil war in Spain called *Die On Your Feet?*

It was my most successful play. It was timely, and, if you will forgive the immodesty, it had some merit as a play, and as poetry.

The title of that play...

I'm ahead of you, Congressman, forgive me. It's true. The title is from a rather famous speech by Dolores Ibarrúri, a great leader of the Spanish people, who...

She was a Commonist?

She is *a Communist, Congressman, but surely...*

Did you ever meet this Miss . . . I believe she was called The Passionairia?

La Pasionaria. Yes, I met her.

In Spain?

Naturally. I covered that war for the wire services. Being a conspicuously unsuccessful dramatist, I have had to earn my living as a newspaperman, radio commentator, free-lance writer, lecturer. I even made a motion picture once. I hope that hasn't become subversive since last month.

What was the occasion of your meeting this Commonist woman?

Mr. Congressman, as a correspondent for the wire services, I met a great many people in Spain and elsewhere. I also met Francisco Franco, who was and is a fascist and an uncommonly unpleasant man. That is a newspaperman's job, sir, meeting people, talking to them, listening to them, reporting what they have to say, what they do, where they go...

Did you find this Dolores a pleasant person?

She was a... just a moment. (Witness paused and wiped his eyes with a handkerchief.) *Excuse me. I was thinking of something else. What was the question, please?*

Counsel asked you. Let me rephrase that. You said General Franco was, if I heard you correctly, a most unpleasant person. Did you find, counsel asked you if you found Mrs. Dolores...

Mrs. Ibarrúri.

Mrs. Ibarrúri a pleasant person?

Let's get this straight, gentlemen of the committee. I found Dolores Ibarrúri, I consider her one of the greatest human beings of our generation, one of the greatest leaders of her people ever to have emerged upon the stage of history, and I think there are literally millions, in Spain and elsewhere, who would agree with me.

You are in sympathy with her ideas?

I didn't say that. I'm aware that this committee is unreservedly in favor of Franco. It's on record...

This committee, sir, is unreservedly opposed to commonism; it does not approve of the Red government of Spain...

There was *no Red government of Spain, Mr. Congressman...*

That's a matter of opinion, Mr. Lang...

It's not *a matter of opinion, sir, it's a matter of fact.*

Your attitude is contemptuous, Mr. Lang.

I'm a reporter, sir. I deal in facts, not opinions. I spent almost two years in Spain during that war on both sides of the lines. Franco made no bones and makes no bones about being a fascist. But the government of the Spanish Republic, which he overthrew—I'm ashamed to say with the active assistance of our own government—was not *a Communist or even a socialist government.*

You are ashamed of our government?

I didn't say that. I said...

Just a moment, Mr. Lang...

Just a moment, Mr. Investigator. I would like to explore this. I said I was ashamed to say that the Spanish Republic was overthrown with the active assistance of my own government. It was, *and I am ashamed of that. And so are millions...*

I'm not interested in your opinions, Mr. Lang...

You brought me here to hear my opinions...

I did not. We did not. The committee subpoenaed you because it believes, has reason to believe...

The committee is misinformed.

Mr. Lang, are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Commonist Party?

No.

You are not?

I am not.

Have you been?

No.

You have never been?

I answered your question, Mr. Counsel. How many times do you want it answered?

Once is enough, Mr. Lang. [Pause.] Mr. Chairman, I would like at this time, to read for the record a passage from a book written by the witness after he returned from Spain. The title is: *Madrid Will Be—*. Published in New York, first edition, 1939. Reprinted four times in 1939, also in 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943, 1945. On page 346, the passage reads:

"Spain was lost because the great democracies were so blinded by anti-communist passion that they fell easy prey to the lies of inter-

national fascism. Spain was lost because it was possible for the Spanish, German and Italian fascists working hand in glove with their opposite numbers in England, France and in the United States of America to strangle a legally-constituted democratic nation. Let there be no mistake about it: there was never any danger of communism in Spain although the Spanish Communist Party and the Communist parties of the world, thousands of whose members fought and died in Spain, gave an example of unselfish devotion which has no parallel in modern history."

Is that a question?

Did you write that?

Obviously I wrote it. The book you're holding carries my name on the title page, doesn't it?

Do you still believe that statement?

I will stand by that statement, yes. It's the truth. I'm not in the habit of denying the facts of history, sir.

You testified under oath, did you not, that you are not and have not been a member of the Commonist party?

Are you implying that there is a contradiction between my answer and the passage you have just read from my book?

Mr. Lang. Allow me, counsel. Nobody has implied anything. You just raised the question yourself. You stated that you had met and admired the woman commonist leader, Mrs. Ib— Mrs. Ibarra. You made it amply plain that you supported the Red government of Spain...

Excuse me. I said there was *no Red government of Spain.*

I know you did. You made it plain, in the passage just read by counsel, that you held, and apparently still hold unbounded admiration for what the commonists did in Spain, and...

This is the most absurd conversation I've ever been involved in. You're distorting what I said, what I wrote. You permit your prejudices to blind you to the facts. You're investigating—if I may make so bold—in a field I believe is forbidden to you by the Constitution of this country—the field of opinion and belief—and if you don't agree with me...

Mr. Lang. Permit me to say that you sound... You mentioned this committee's investigation last month of subversive propaganda in the motion picture industry. Permit me to say that you sound exactly like those Hollywood witnesses who appeared before us and likewise refused to answer our questions.

I answered your questions, Mr. Chairman.

You seem to take the same position. Ten of them were cited by this committee, Mr. Lang, and their case will come up this month before the House of Representatives, and let me assure you that

that body will find every one of them in contempt of the Congress of the United States.

Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry if I have been misunderstood or was carried away by emotion. I'm an emotional man. You asked me your sixty-four-dollar question. I answered it. I did not feel it necessary to expand on the answer because I believe, as I stated, that this committee has no legal authority to examine into a man's mind.

We're not examining your mind, sir. Nobody is interested in your mind.

It looks that way to me.

We are like you, Mr. Lang. We're interested in facts. It seems to me that you are either a very naive man, or you're concealing information from this committee.

I resent that...

Go ahead, resent it. Is there any reason why the witness should not be excused?

May I finish, please...

I have no further questions...

I have some further answers, Mr. Congressman. I have some rights here and...

You have rights, Mr. Lang, and the committee has its obligations to the American people. I'm inclined to believe that you easily could be in contempt of this committee, and if you will recall, I've had occasion to admonish you several times about your supercilious attitude, a facetious...

Just a moment, sir. I'd like to answer that...

You will have an opportunity, Mr. Lang. Mr. Counsel, I suggest that the witness be kept under subpoena in case we wish to ask him some more questions.

I have a doctor's appointment, Mr. Congressman, but I can easily cancel it. Ask your questions now, please. I'll answer them.

The committee is in recess.

2

April 4, 1938

All the way down the winding coast road from Barcelona, Lang was deeply depressed. Since the first of April the city had been full of rumors. The fascists were driving on Tortosa with the intention of cutting Spain in half.

Three days later it seemed not only possible but likely. Below Tarragona the scene was familiar, and heart-breaking. The paved road was clogged with refugees moving north. They tied up the traffic—the occasional military *camiones* moving south toward the front, wherever the hell that was.

Nobody, not even the chief of staff, knew where the front was at the moment. There were innumerable check points at which soldiers stopped the car and examined their papers. The soldiers' faces were grave, but their courtesy was invariable.

Clem Elliman, who was driving, took the occasion at each stop to exercise his fluent command of Spanish profanity. This annoyed Lang even more. He tried to figure out why he should be annoyed by Clem's manipulation of the tongue and could only conclude that it must have been because he was annoyed with Elliman on every level at the moment.

They had been friends for years. They had met all over Europe and Asia and the United States at various times and had always hit it off. But there was no denying the fact that on this particular day, Lang would have been delighted if Elliman had dropped dead.

Watching the crawling stream of refugees passing slowly north as the Matford moved south, Lang knew that what he felt about Clem had something to do with the presence of Dolores Muñoz, who was sitting in the back of the French Ford with him. He had behaved like a child, he realized. He had exploited Elliman's enormous size to get Dolores to sit in back with him.

What the hell am I jealous of, Lang thought, his size? *Posible.* There was an old saying, attributed to God knows who: "When six foot six speaks, women listen." Elliman was being as gallant as all hell to Dolores, who stood all of five feet and was proportionately tiny all over, but he had given no indication that he was more than ordinarily interested in her. Lang was.

Dolores was the perfect miniature woman Lang had always hankered after, and he knew that she liked him. Perfectly formed in all her parts. He was beginning to believe he was in love with her and he was wondering what to do about his wife, Anne, left behind in New York. Not that Dolores had shown him anything more than warm friendship, and this she demonstrated to all the correspondents who came to the office where she worked under Constancia de la Mora, chief of the foreign press bureau.

Lang grew more exasperated every time Clem felt it necessary to exhibit his profane Spanish vocabulary. The first time they were stopped he limited himself to *Me cago en Dios,* a common enough phrase, almost as tolerable in these circumstances as the French

merde, alors. Thereafter he began to embroider the phrase and Zav was convinced that he was doing it deliberately.

The stream of refugees was endless, painful groups of older men and women with small children trudging north on foot or prodding emaciated *burros* hitched to carts piled high with worthless household goods, crockery, ruptured mattresses, ancient chairs, bedsprings and chamberpots. A few household animals, goats and sheep, were tethered to the carts as well but were always escaping and being chased over the landscape.

The mountains that bordered the serpentine road on the west dropped steeply to the coastal littoral and the Mediterranean was as blue as any cheap picture postcard of the Mediterranean. Lang turned to Dolores, whose tiny hand was resting in his own. She looked at him simultaneously and Zav took this as an omen of their kinship. Her almost automatic smile appeared, and Zav felt his heart literally turn over in his chest.

As though he had eyes in the back of his head—or perhaps he was watching in the mirror despite his insane driving—Elliman in the front seat said, *"Dolores, cuidado con Lang. Es un lobo."*

"Lobo?" said Dolores, and Lang gave her a twisted grin and said, "Clem says you should be careful of me because I'm a wolf."

"She understands the language," said Elliman with a roar. He never spoke under a roar. Perhaps he felt it went with his six-foot-six.

"I don't understand wolf," said Dolores, squeezing Lang's hand with what he realized was more of sympathetic understanding of the rib than any amorous intention.

"Sort of a Don Juan," said Clem and Dolores smiled at Lang. *"Verdad?"* she said.

"I should live so long," said Lang, and Dolores looked puzzled and said, *"Perdón?"*

Zav didn't answer because they had been stopped again by a soldier who was explaining that they couldn't go any further. The fascists were in Tortosa, he said, but another soldier said there was much doubt of that and the two got into an argument with Elliman roaring at both, showing papers stamped by General Walter, *Comandante* of the 35th Division, *a salvoconducto* from the *Comisariado* of the International Brigades, a letter from the *New York Times* and everything else he had in his pockets including a gift-certificate from Sulka's on Fifth Avenue.

"Me cago en la leche!" Elliman shouted, and informed the soldiers that it was equal with him whether *el sodomita* Franco himself were in Tortosa. He had important business at the front. He was accompanied by the distinguished American dramatist Francis Xavier

Lang and *Señorita* Dolores Albareda Muñoz of the foreign press bureau of the Republic.

The soldiers dutifully examined all the papers Clem had presented, handed them back and shrugged their shoulders. Clem threw the car into gear and it leaped forward like a mountain goat, throwing Lang and Dolores together. Zav exploited the accident by putting his arm around her, and she did not seem to object. But his fury with Elliman was mounting by the moment.

He turned to the girl, who looked up at him with enormous black eyes, and he said soberly, "Do you know what the Lincoln Battalion boys call Elliman?"

She shook her head. "Foul! Below the belt!" Elliman shouted, steering wildly around a string of refugee wagons in the road ahead and honking madly. He was even crazier than the Spanish drivers, Lang decided.

"They call him the Best Equipped Soldier in Spain," Lang said. And he told her that Clem carried two letters carefully buttoned into the breast-pockets of his American Army shirt. In the left-hand pocket he had a letter from Negrin himself, in the right he had a letter from FDR. If he were to be captured by the fascists, he would eat Negrin's letter and display Roosevelt's. If he were to be questioned by the Republican forces, he could show Negrin's.

"OK, OK," said Elliman. "You took that one on points."

Lang went on to enumerate, item by item, the equipment Clem carried with him all over Spain, and which practically none of the Republican army men possessed—even the officers. He had a huge pair of Zeiss binoculars hung around his neck, an American Army map-case slung at his side, with a genuine military map inside it. He carried an engineer's compass and claimed to be able to use it. In his left-hand rear pants pocket he had a solid silver flask that held a full fifth of Irish whiskey, which he said was the only potable liquid in the world. He wore high laced boots and even carried a Boy Scout knife and a waterproof match-safe. On his left wrist was an expensive chronograph that he used to calculate the distance of enemy artillery by timing the interval between the muzzle flash and the sound of the piece itself.

"Maybe you'd like a slug of Jameson right now," Elliman said and actually slowed down for a hole in the road. He didn't wait for an answer but started to think out loud.

"They've plastered this road all right," he said and pulled off into the shallow ditch to get around a shell-hole. He came to a full stop and looked ahead for a moment. Then he turned and faced

them both. His full beard was almost bright red in the low rays of the spring sun.

"You know," he said, "it was a mistake to bring Dolores."

"You suggested it," said Lang.

"She organized the car," said Clem. "It was only right she should come, and she said she wanted to."

"We had no way of knowing what it would be like."

"Wrong again," said Elliman. "We knew damned well that we didn't know the score. In fact, this road looks too quiet to suit me. Why did you insist on her coming along; for protection?"

"Bastante," said Dolores quietly. She understood English and could speak it without an accent, but she felt like speaking Spanish for the moment.

"Guapa," said Elliman. "The decision is yours. Do we go on to Tortosa or do we turn back?"

Lang got hot under the collar. "Why is the decision *hers*? Aren't you the man of action, the outdoor type, the big game hunter?" Ashamed of his own fear, Lang said, "Are you scared?"

"Claro," said Clem. "Almost as scared as you. But my dad back in Minnesota used to say, 'Clem old cock, once you start something, see it through'."

They heard the planes before they saw them and Elliman was the first one out of the car, vaulting his six-foot-six, two hundred and sixty pounds of beef right over the side with astonishing agility. *"Abajo!"* he was shouting as he took cover in the ditch. *"Aviónes!"*

Dolores and Zav dropped into the ditch beside Clem, and he promptly stood up, took the binoculars out of the case and carefully focused them on the sky.

"Get down," said Lang but Elliman paid no attention. In fact, he even stepped out into the road again to get a better field. "Junkers," he said. "Fokkers. An appropriate name, that. And some ME's on top for cover." He squatted on the road, pulled the map out of his case and spread it out.

"Get back in the ditch, you damn fool," cried Lang, and Elliman looked mildly at him as though he were reproaching a child and said, "They're not interested in dramatists. There's the bridge at Cherta, for one thing, not to mention the highway to Castellón de la Plana."

He folded the map with some difficulty, for there was a mild wind blowing, and put it back in his case. He turned to Dolores and said, "Do we go on, *guapa?*"

Dolores looked at Lang and he smiled. She turned to Clem and said, *"Claro,"* and he slapped himself on the thigh and said, "Now that's a woman for you! *Muy mujer!*" He pretended to focus his

steel-blue eyes on her with consuming intensity and said in a low voice, "I could *use* a woman like you in my business—all eighty-five pounds of you."

"Cut it out," said Lang and Elliman roared and climbed into the car. "Round two," he announced. "The challenger came out of his corner with a feint to the middle, but the old champ..."

"Lay off, I said!" Lang shouted and Clem popped his eyes at him.

"Si, señor," he said, touched his ski-cap and started the car...

Tortosa was a shambles and smoke was still rising from the new wreckage the bombers had created in their passage. The bridge across the Ebro was still passable, however, at low speed, and they crawled across and turned north. There was no sign of enemy action and an American International Brigade sergeant at the check-point beyond the town told them there was no exact information.

"What're *you* doing here?" said Clem. "I thought you boys were up around Batea."

"Traffic control," said the sergeant, whose Southern accent was amazingly incongruous in such a place at such a time. "We're supposed to be at Gandesa, but there's a shit-house rumor (excuse me, *señorita*) that the Brigade's been cut to pieces. If you're looking for the *estado-mayor,* you might find it up near Mora la Nueva, or you might not find it at all."

Elliman tossed the sergeant a pack of Luckies as they started forward again. He didn't smoke himself, but he carried a large supply together with cartons of Hershey bars and Nestlé chocolate in a pack-sack stowed in the back of the car.

Without turning he reached behind him, pulled out the enormous flask and handed it back to Lang and Dolores. "Have a slug," he said. "I have a hunch it may come in handy."

He drove much more slowly, watching both sides of the winding road bordered with high shrub-covered hills, and whenever he saw a human being he slowed down or stopped and took a squint through his binoculars.

For the next five kilometers the road was completely deserted, and there were several squadrons of Messerschmitts, too high to worry about. There was even a flight of five Republican *Chatos* flying north about two hundred feet off the deck. They didn't hear them till they were directly overhead, and Elliman ducked his head as they passed over with a roar and dipped their red wing-tips in salute. (I'd like to fly one of those things, Lang thought.)

"It's great to see we have five fighters," Clem said over his shoulder to Dolores. *"Me cago en este Blum!"* he shouted. "On my

way down from Paris last week with Jimmy Sheean I saw all kinds of planes at the border, crated and uncrated. They even had the French colors painted off their wings. There was anti-aircraft artillery, plenty of pom-pom guns and even a few tanks. Standing there! Rotting in a hayfield near Bourg-Madam." He turned to look at them and almost ran off the road.

"Me cago en la leche de la Virgen puta!" he shouted, and Lang smiled at Dolores, who merely shook her head and wore a sad expression on her small, heart-shaped face...

They saw the group of men seated on the hillside near the road and came to an abrupt halt. Clem whipped out his binoculars and inspected them. The men saw them, too, but none got up. They were a nondescript looking bunch but at least they didn't seem armed. One man, better dressed than the others, was standing. The rest were squatting on the ground.

Elliman turned around and boomed quietly, "They look like Americans to me, but *quien sabe?"* They had no idea where they were, except that they were nearer Cherta than they were to Tortosa. The sound of artillery was fairly loud in the northern hills and even occasional machine-gun fire could be heard. Clem passed the glasses to Zav and Dolores, and it was the girl who said, "One of those men is naked."

Simultaneously, a voice from the hillside yelled, "Hey, got any butts?" and Elliman vaulted out of the car. "Who's afraid of the big bad wolf?" he said. "You, *chica?"* Dolores laughed and Clem turned to Zav and said, "Gimme that blanket."

As they walked slowly up the gentle rise three abreast they suddenly saw the Citrően parked below them around the bend, and Zav said, "That's Blau." (He meant the man standing up.)

"Who?" said Elliman.

"Ben Blau of the *Globe-Times,"* said Zav and Dolores said, "You met him in my office."

"Scooped, by Gad!" Elliman roared as they reached the men. He lifted his arm in the Republican gesture and shouted, *"Salud!"*

The men on the ground responded without too much enthusiasm, and Elliman turned on Blau, a much smaller man with an ugly face and a beautiful smile. "How the hell did *you* get here?" He tossed the blanket to the naked man, who wrapped himself in it as Dolores turned her head.

"The usual way," said Blau and grinned. "Hello, Dolores. Don't worry, pal," he said to Clem. "We'll pool the story."

"To hell with that!" said Clem. "I'll be screwed if I'll be scooped by a second-string character from a third-string paper."

They all alughed and Zav said to the men on the ground, "You boys look beat."

All four were shivering, even those who had clothes. They had week-old beards that were matted with filth. Those who had clothes were in rags, rags that were neatly patched and looked like the clothing of Spanish peasants (which they were), but three had no shoes and the one who had them had taken them off. His feet were bleeding.

"We were lost," said Elliman and made the introductions. The man in the blanket snorted. *"You're* lost?" he said and introduced himself. "Kominsky," he said. "Faber, Gowen, Pellegrini."

Clem looked at the man called Faber and said, "Not *Joe* Faber?"

"A piece of him," said the man and Elliman bent down to pump his hand.

"I've read your stuff, boy. It's good."

"Thanks," said Faber. "I've read yours too."

Elliman waited for him to go on but Faber said nothing further, so Clem continued. "Weren't you at the Writers Congress last year?" Faber nodded, scowling.

"I hope you get out of this alive," the big man said and Faber said, *"También."*

"Yeah," said Clem, scratching his big head. "Because I feel sort of responsible for your being here."

Faber looked blank and they all watched Elliman with their mouths half open. He didn't notice it but said, "I know that speech I made at Carnegie Hall was responsible for a lot of the boys coming over."

There was a pause. Then Lang, who had taken out a notebook, asked the men for their names and home addresses and said, "I'll put them on the wire tonight."

"I'll give them to you," said Blau with a smile. Lang was chagrined.

"Where'd *you* get a car, Blau?" said Elliman.

"Borrowed it from Joe North of the *Daily Worker.*"

"Uh-huh," said Lang. "I knew it. Bad company you're in, colleague. Wait'll your editor hears about this."

"No worse than you've been in," said Blau.

The naked man in the blanket said, *"La señorita es muy hermosa."*

"That's a fine accent you got there, fella," said Elliman.

"Brooklyn," said Kominsky.

"Gracias, compañero," said Dolores.

"De nada." Kominsky blushed.

"What happened?" said Clem, getting out his map and spreading it on the ground. Then he suddenly remembered something, put a

couple of stones on the map and ran down the hill to the car.

He came loping back with the packsack, opened it and began to hand out Luckies, Camels, Chesterfields, some Gauloises (blue) and chocolate bars. He even had a tin of sardines, a box of Domino sugar cubes and some first-aid material for Pellegrini's feet.

"It was a fuck-up," said Pellegrini, then added, *"Scusi,"* with a shy glance at the girl. "We've been on the run ever since Belchite. Caspe, Alcañiz, Hijar. *You* know," he said, glancing at Clem, who was following Pellegrini on his map. He nodded.

"What happened at Batea?" he asked.

"Cut off. Surrounded again," said Gowen. "Sabotage, if you ask me." The others nodded.

"We'd rested there a week and got replacements, then went into the lines again," said Kominsky. "Only there weren't any lines. Held a position on a low hill and went to sleep that night only to wake up to fire from three sides. We beat them off till late the next afternoon, when everything was quiet as the grave and Merriman decided to pull out and move down toward Gandesa. That's the last I saw of *him.*"

"Or Doran for that matter," said Faber. "I was one of the replacements. My first action." He looked at the others and said, "I only saw Doran once. He made us a short speech before we went in. Said any man who lost a rifle would be shot." The four men laughed.

"I hung on to mine all the way," Faber continued. "Then, once I got across the river, somebody organized it when I was asleep."

"How'd you get across?" said Blau to the four.

"Swam," said Kominsky, pulling the blanket closer around his thin body. He indicated Gowen and Pellegrini. "Near Rasquera. The bridge is gone."

"I walked across at Mora del Ebro," said Faber, "just before we blew the bridge. Tanks were following us down the Gandesa road and they began lobbing shells across the minute we got over."

"Then what happened?" said Elliman.

"Who knows?" said Kominsky. "We heard Merriman and Dave got captured. Haven't seen Busch either. They were good men. There's all kinds of rumors, mostly that the Brigade was cut to pieces, but a guy told me Cópic and some others were OK."

"River must be cold," said Elliman.

"Freeze the balls off. . .*scusi,"* said Pellegrini. "There was ten of us together when we got there, following the fascists for three days as they advanced, right behind 'em."

"Then what'd you do?" said Clem, and Lang watched Blau instead of the man who was talking. Blau's face was as solid as though it had been cut from stone. He seemed completely absorbed in what

Pellegrini was saying. But Pellegrini didn't answer the last question. Instead, Kominsky spoke.

"Whyn't you ask Blau?" he said. "We gave him the whole story."

"We've got to get this man some clothes," said Dolores.

Kominsky looked at her and said, *"Gracias, compañera."*

"De nada."

"I got some stuff in the car," said Elliman, momentarily ashamed of having pressed these exhausted men for information, "but I think it might be too small for the comrade." Everybody laughed politely as he ran down the hill to get it.

"Great writer," said Gowen.

"Balls!" said Faber with a scowl. "All surface stuff, never gets into his characters. Got two themes and nothing else. Sex and death."

"Something is wrong with sex?" said Pellegrini and winked at Dolores.

Suddenly the question popped out. Lang hadn't intended to ask it, but there it was. "What'd you mean by that crack, Blau?"

"What crack?"

"Something about the company I keep."

"Oh," said Blau with a grin. "Nothing spectacular. Just that I never forgave you for some of the stuff you wrote on the East Coast seamen's strike. The managing editor took me off the story and called you in to do the job."

"Aha!" said Lang. "Professional jealousy."

"That's part of it," said Blau.

"I thought it was good objective stuff."

"What's objective? When you visited strike headquarters and heard their side of the story, you wrote a good piece. Then you went out to dinner with the shipowners and suddenly you were on *their* side."

"I see what you mean, Ben," said Lang and laughed. "It was a good dinner. Too much cognac afterwards, maybe."

Blau smiled and Lang suddenly grew serious and said, "They had a point, you know. There are always two sides to any question — important question, that is."

"Are there?" said Ben and Dolores giggled. The four men on the ground had been following this conversation with interest, but now Elliman returned somewhat out of breath and tossed an enormous sweat shirt and a huge pair of ski pants into Kominsky's lap.

"Thanks," Kominsky said, and pulled the pants under the blanket. Dolores turned her head and heard Blau say, "Do you think Franco's got a point, too, or isn't this an important question?"

"Now, now," said Elliman, "what's the score?"

"No," said Lang, "this is different."

"Why?" said Blau, and Lang laughed and said, "I'll repeat what I said before: wait'll your editor reads your copy."

"I file it every day," said Blau, and Elliman said, "Lay off the sparring." Then, to Blau, "Why don't you have dinner with us tomorrow at the Majestic, and Zav'll go ten rounds with you."

"If you accept second-stringers in the same ring." Blau grinned and Elliman roared and pounded him on the back, nearly knocking him off his feet.

"I like that," he said. *"That* I like." He fished out his flask and handed it to Ben. "Have a slug."

Ben took the flask and said, "Thanks," and bowing to Elliman, he said, "Do you mind?"

He handed the huge flask to the four men on the ground, who drank from it as Elliman laughed as though he'd rupture himself. *"Magnifico!"* he shouted. Lang admired Blau's brass in baiting Elliman. Nobody treated a trained seal like Clem that way.

Kominsky emerged from behind the blanket, rose, staggered a moment, then stood quietly in the outsized clothing.

"Christ!" he said. "When I climbed out of the Ebro I thought I was dead for sure. *Now* look at me!"

"You look ready for the Resurrection right now," said Faber and did not join in the laughter.

"Me cago en los veinte-cuatro cojónes de los doce discipulos de Dios!" roared Elliman.

3

November 7, 1947

Lang took a cab from Foley Square, where the committee was sitting, to Dr. Morton's office in East Fifty-third Street but most of the way uptown he found it impossible to relax. His heart was pounding violently. He had to take deep gulps of air and wondered momentarily whether he was having a heart attack. At forty-seven? Why not? he thought, recalling that his father, of whom he had no recollection whatsoever, had died of his first (and last) heart-attack at forty-one. *Requiescat,* he thought. There was no pain.

He recognized, by the time the cab had reached Grand Central and circled the ramp onto Park Avenue, that his physiological state was the direct product of controlled anger. He was boiling mad inside, and he had not been able to work off on the committee itself

as much as five degrees of the rage he had been feeling all the time. He wondered why.

What a ridiculous state of affairs, he thought. The reporters who were hanging around the courtroom had tackled him immediately.

Yes, he had been subpoenaed. Sure, they had asked him the Sixty-four Dollar Question (what a semantic change that phrase had undergone since it was first used on 'Take It or Leave It'!) Beyond that, he would say nothing to the reporters. After all, it was an executive session. Why had the committee called him? Look, boys, he had said, your guess is as good as mine. They were calling all kinds of people in the arts — writers, actors, directors, magazine editors, radio commentators, why not Francis Lang?

He was inclined to laugh the whole thing off. The committee had made a horse's ass of itself, or rather a whole stable of horses' asses, during the fantastic Hollywood investigation last month. The newspapers had taken off after the committee in a way to do a man's heart good, even the pipsqueak American Thunderer, *The New York Times.* Those Hollywood characters had cut the fool committee down to size and practically forced it to close shop.

Maybe that explains why the committee is holding so many executive sessions, Lang thought. Maybe they're afraid to tackle me in public—and the others. I'll bet a lead nickel, he thought, that if the committee brings the Hollywood boys before the House of Representatives, it'll be howled off the floor.

He began to feel much better. Why give it any thought at all? A fishing expedition for publicity and appropriations, nothing more. What do they know about me? he wondered. Nothing. How could they know anything? Wasn't this the same outfit, somewhat differently staffed, who had called Shirley Temple a dupe of the Reds at the age of six?

Lang was smiling when he got to the dignified brownstone house in East Fifty-third Street and mounted the stoop. He walked into the hallway, whose door was always open, took five steps down the hall and tried the first door. The knob didn't turn, so he automatically moved on a few feet, taking the second knob in his hand with the assurance that it would turn.

He closed the door behind him. Dr. Everett Morton had two identical consultation rooms. He was always in one and, as the hour ended, the patient with him left by one door as the good head-shrinker moved into the second room and greeted the next victim.

Lang tossed his hat onto the small table by the window, took off his topcoat and laid it carefully folded across one end of the small Chesterfield that stood against the opposite wall. Then he lit a cigarette, pulled the standing ashtray close to hand, took a deep drag

and exhaled and lay back on the couch with his head against the wedge-shaped cushion.

Here I am, all laid out ready to be worked on, he thought. He chuckled and wondered for the hundredth time whether the doctor, who wasn't a bad-looking egg, ever took advantage of a theoretically gorgeous dish similarly stretched out, or whether the gals had the good sense to sit up or keep their legs crossed.

Where the hell was I yesterday? he thought. Does it matter? It doesn't seem to matter where you were, where you leave off, what you talk about. Morton rarely said anything but "Mmmm," pursing his normally tight lips. Why, Lang thought, a man could invent an entirely fictitious life story and reel it out for years without the poor analyst being any the wiser—if the narrator had an imagination and could keep a straight face. But what would be the point of doing that? (He glanced at his wrist watch.)

Punctually on the hour (it was four) the door between the two consulting rooms opened and Dr. Morton entered quietly as though he were wearing carpet slippers. (Lang even looked at his feet to see if he was. He wasn't.) The doctor said, "Good afternoon, Francis," and sat quietly on the Chesterfield across the room.

Suddenly, Lang crushed the butt in the ashtray, swung his legs and placed both feet on the deep-piled blue carpet and said, "I'm sick of all this crap, Everett. How long have I been coming here? Four months! You know I only started because Anne urged me to. It was more to please her than out of any real necessity. And what the hell good is it doing anyhow? I'm sick of it."

Morton pursed those god-damned lips again and said, "Mmmm." Then, since it was obvious that Lang wasn't going to say any more for a time, the doctor spoke. "Who are you kidding, Zav?"

Lang stared at the younger man and resented his youth. "You know," he said, "my father died of a heart-attack at your age."

Morton actually smiled this time. "You've read too many books, Zav," the analyst said. "Relax. Lie back and let off all that steam."

To his own astonishment Lang obediently lay back on the couch, reached in his side pocket for another cigarette, lit it and smoked it for a while quietly. Suppose I just lie here for the whole god-damned hour and say nothing, what will he do? he wondered. He decided immediately that that would be a hell of a way to throw 20 bucks down the drain. Twenty times five times a week times four weeks a month times four months now is how much? Oh, what the hell? he thought. Let us have the play. Curtain going up. Might as well entertain the bastard till the next sucker comes in.

"I remember that after my father died there were never any men around the place. I'll correct that. I never remember *any* men, be-

cause I don't remember my father. Where all the uncles were that almost every family seems to be provided with I don't know. And my mother, being a good Catholic, went into deep mourning and her constancy to the memory of my father was the American Catholic equivalent of that fine old Hindu custom, *suttee*.

"But I do remember an awful lot of women—not individually or by name, but by face, figure, costume, even smell. Ah, the smell of women! They were fluttering all around me, and I must have learned by the age of six how to twist them around my little penis—I mean finger, and *there's* a slip for you!

"I was always able to get practically anything I wanted out of my mother. She worked her fingers to the bone to give me what I asked for, or at least tried to. We were poor as church mice (*Why that's at least sixteen hundred bucks so far!*) though I never saw a church mouse in my life, did you?

"But I saw a lot of things I shouldn't have seen and I remember endless female figures, endless odors of talcum and rice powder and perfume—all of it cheap, the kind you buy in Penney's—endless solicitude for the sole surviving male in the family. And I suppose I was the type-specimen nasty little boy, for we used to have an outhouse in back and when my youngest aunt used to go out there to read the Sears Roebuck catalog—oh, to hell with it. . ."

"To hell with it," Dr. Morton said quietly, and the interruption was so unexpected that Lang turned his head to look at the analyst.

"Huh?" he said.

"This isn't what's on your mind," said Morton quietly.

"How do you know?"

"You told me all this before. Do you want me to play it back to you?"

Lang sat up. He was horror-stricken. "Have you got a wire-recorder here?"

"No," Morton smiled. "I have a mind that works like one." His face grew serious. "There's something else you'd rather talk about, or maybe you'd rather not, just yet."

Lang cursed under his breath. Do I have a face like a pane of window glass? he wondered. He lay back on the couch. The quiet voice went on as Lang lay there strangely relaxed.

"You were angry when you came in. You said you were fed up with all this crap. You said that too, a month ago. You came to me because you needed help. Remember? You weren't able to work. You couldn't write a line of your new play. You couldn't even do the weekly fifteen minute radio program and had to hire a writer." He paused and Lang remained silent.

"How is the play going?"

"Slow."

"The program was good last Sunday. I've rarely heard you in better form."

"OK," said Lang. "I surrender, dear. You'll see it in the evening papers anyhow. I was tagged by the Committee on Un-American Activities. I just came from there."

"Mmmm," said Morton, and Lang could see the pursed lips without turning his head.

"Coming here in the cab I thought I was having a heart attack. I couldn't breathe, practically gasped for air. Couldn't figure it out. What the hell do I care for these hack politicians? Their god-damned committee has been functioning for years and they haven't written a piece of legislation yet. How *can* they? They can't even *read.*

"But I don't like being pushed around. I don't like to have to answer to anyone for what I say or do, what I write or think, what I believe, the people I go around with. I don't like the whole Gestapo atmosphere these characters are cooking up. It smells too much like Nazi Germany. I know. I was there in '36, just before I went to Spain."

"What are you afraid of?" Morton asked quietly and Lang paused for a long time before he answered.

"Nothing."

"Then how do you account for the difficulty in breathing; the recollection of your father's heart attack?"

"Yeah," Lang said slowly. "Yeah." He reached for another cigarette, put it in his mouth but didn't light it. He lay for quite a long time wishing he had a drink, staring at the ceiling. There was a crack in the otherwise immaculate plaster that looked like the main vein of a leaf with several capillaries running off to dissolve into the pure white surface. I could have had a drink downtown if those damned reporters hadn't been hanging around.

Morton is a German refugee, he thought. Morton is a Jew. Morton got out of Germany the year I covered the Nazi reoccupation of the Rhineland. I must ask him some time how he did it.

"This committee," Lang said slowly, "says it's hunting Reds, Communists. That's for the record." He turned his head and looked at Morton. "Sound familiar?"

"I have a long memory," said Morton. "But you are a famous man, respected in your field everywhere. You have a good friend in the White House."

"I *had* a good friend in the White House," Lang said. "He's dead." Morton will understand, he thought. Morton has been through all this before; he was even forced into exile by it. The

committee is plainly anti-Semitic, openly pro-Nazi, frankly fascist-minded.

"What does the Gestapo have on you?" said Dr. Morton. "You're not a Jew. I have read your books. You're not a Communist."

"So far as these birds are concerned," said Lang after a pause, "it makes no difference. *You* know that much. Red is a scare word, a tag, a label. There isn't one out of ten people who can tell you what a Communist is or has ever met a real live one in the flesh."

"I told you about Dolores Muñoz. (Morton nodded.) It was all mixed up with her. And with Ben Blau. Both of them had a terrific influence on me, I guess."

"Blau I do not remember," Morton said. . .

4

April 5, 1938

The argument began in the glass-domed dining room of the Majestic Hotel on the Paseo de Gracia the day after Zav, Clem and Ben Blau returned from the Tortosa front with Dolores Muñoz, and it mounted while the skimpy meal was being served.

Ben thought it was astonishing that the two men could get so hot under the collar on the subject of "integrity" and "objectivity" as applied to the work of newspapermen, and he accused them both of astonishing naiveté combined with the most profound cynicism.

Dolores, for the most part, was content to listen, an amused expression on her face that Clem constantly referred to as "the Gioconda smile."

"I'm amazed," said Ben as the dreadful beverage that was called coffee was served, "that guys who've been newspapering as long as you have still have so many illusions about the business."

"Who has illusions?" said Zav, and Clem said, "I left my illusions in my diapers."

"Then why all this talk of objectivity, of freedom of the press when you both know damned well who owns the press?"

"Nobody ever told *me* how to write," said Elliman, "and he bloody well better not."

"*Tampoco,*" said Lang.

"Maybe they don't have to tell you," said Ben with a smile. "Maybe they know you'll write as they please."

"Now, now," said Dolores. "We're all friends here."

"I'm sick of this bilge," said Lang. "I've heard it all my life, ever since I started as a copyboy on the P. I. Mind you, I don't like Hearst. But I'll say this much for him: *he* never told me how to write either, and anybody in the USA who has an opinion—no matter how crackpot—can get it expressed in print."

"That reminds me of Anatole France's famous crack," said Ben. "You know the one..."

"Sure, sure," said Lang. "About sleeping under the bridges. I know. He was a sloppy-minded socialist with the tastes of a millionaire."

"Well, to paraphrase it," said Ben with a grin, "the law in its majestic equality permits the rich as well as the poor to start a newspaper—so long as they have six million bucks."

"Very funny," said Clem. He was suddenly very serious and he said, "Answer me this, Anatole. When did your paper ever stop you from writing the truth?"

"Two years ago," said Ben.

"He told us yesterday," said Lang. "You weren't listening."

"He didn't tell *me,*" said Clem.

"He was covering the seamen's strike and Ferguson took him off the story."

"That right?" said Elliman. "Why?"

"Because I must have revealed my bias in favor of the strikers." Ben smiled. "They called in Zav, the trained seal, to write a series of feature articles. I hung around the office hoping to get a look at him, but he never came to the office."

"What would you have done?" said Dolores. "Kill him?"

"Probably," said Ben.

Elliman brought his Bushmill's out from under the table and poured a slug for everyone. "Hold it, hold it," he said. "You just said something. You were caught with your bias down."

"That's right," said Ben.

"Then what did you expect?" said Zav. "You're not supposed to show bias even if you have it."

"Don't *you?*"

"You told *me* yesterday," Zav laughed. "I'm an oyster. I smack of the water in which I live. When I was with the shipowners, I was on their side. When I was with the strikers..."

"That's objectivity," Dolores said, deadpan, and Zav pinched her thigh and she screamed. People looked at them and they covered up by laughing.

"Are you objective *here?*" said Ben. "Don't answer. *You* told *me* yesterday. You admitted this was different."

"Look," said Elliman. "It's simple. You write the truth without

fear or favor. That's what you do. The truth of this situation is what we all write, I'm sure." He turned to Lang. *"Verdad?"*

"Claro," said Lang.

"Then why couldn't I write the truth about the seamen's strike?"

"How do you know you were writing the truth?" said Clem, scratching his beard till it bristled.

"Oh, Christ," said Ben, momentarily annoyed, "how do you know anything? Because, in 1928 I worked a year as a seaman. I know what I was paid, and I know how I lived. Conditions were just as bad in 1936. I wrote factually and accurately what the strikers said about their beef. The facts could be checked. But the *Globe* didn't want them for the very simple reason that the *Globe* not only gets heavy advertising sugar from the shipowners, but because the *Globe* is also anti-union."

There was a momentary silence and Dolores said quietly, "Answer it, Zav. Answer Ben." (She pronounced it Ven.)

"Let's go up to my room," said Lang, "and *eat.*"

"Let's go up to mine," said Elliman. "I've got more than you."

So they walked up (the elevator wasn't working) and in Clem's room he brought out a fresh bottle of Bushmill's together with a choice assortment of French sausages, *paté de foie gras,* Dutch butter in tin cans, bread and Italian sardines swimming in tomato sauce.

"No fascist sardines for me," said Ben.

"See what I mean?" said Clem. "The man's a fanatic. He's even biased against Italian sardines!"

"Not the sardines," said Ben. "Not the Italians. Fascism. I hate the system that bombs this... listen," he said.

They listened and they heard. Then the air-raid sirens started to howl, and the light in the room went out even before Clem could reach for the switch.

They sat silently for a moment and then Lang said, "Maybe we should go down to the *refugio.*"

"Too late," said Clem. "If you're gonna get it, you're gonna get it."

So they sat silently and heard the anti-aircraft, and for a change no bombs fell but the planes droned off toward the Mediterranean from which they had come. In a while the all-clear sounded and the lights came on again.

They blinked in the sudden light and looked at each other's pale faces and Dolores said, "I really must go," and Clem took her arm and said, "Sit down, Gioconda, and watch us take this man apart."

"He seems very well put together," Dolores said, and Zav looked sharply at her to determine whether she meant that in a personal sense or not. He couldn't tell.

"Gracias, señorita," said Ben. He turned to Zav and said, "You didn't answer my question."

"What question?"

"About the *Globe's* reason for wanting a certain kind of story about the seamen's strike that I wasn't prepared to write."

"Oh," said Lang, "I suppose it happens. And why not? There's a lot of money tied up in shipping. Not to mention publishing."

"Q. E. D."

"Yes and no. They didn't beef about *my* stories, and, incidentally, are they beefing about your stuff now?"

"You bet your life," said Ben. "There's a gal on the copy desk who clips what they print and sends it to me. They've killed eight stories in the last six months."

"Stepped on a sacred cow, huh?" said Elliman.

"Several," said Ben. "To wit: the Catholic Church; the nature of fascism, as demonstrated here; the personal interests of the landlords and industrialists—in terms of dollars and cents; Britain's invest. . ." Suddenly he remembered something.

"Matthews must have told you about his own experience last year after Guadalajara, when he described the rout of Musso's blackshirts."

"Sure, sure," said Elliman.

"Then how do you explain that cable he got asking him why he said there were Italians at Guadalajara when the other *Times* man denied it?"

"Just one of those things," said Clem.

"The hell it was," said Ben. "The other *Times* man's a fascist, and he's proved it. And the *Times* didn't *want* its readers to know the blackshirts were in Spain. That's objectivity for you."

"That's freedom of the press," said Dolores and jumped before Zav could pinch her.

"It seems to me," said Elliman, "you've lost your balance completely. Matthews didn't beef about it."

"I sure have," said Ben hotly. "I've been here six months and I'm mad all the way through. So mad—" he said and stopped himself. He was feeling the liquor and hadn't intended to say a word about it.

"So mad that what?" said Clem and Dolores looked at him, for she knew what Ben was talking about. He'd been in her office that afternoon.

Ben glanced at her and when he did Zav and Elliman looked, too, and saw the tears.

"Que tal?" said Zav, but she shook her head. The two men turned to Ben and Clem said, "What's up?"

Ben slowly took out of his inside pocket a carbon copy of the cable he had sent to Ferguson that afternoon. "This is strictly off the record," said Ben, "till Ferguson receives it."

FERGUSON. TIMES. NEW YORK. EEUU. ACCEPT RESIGNATION EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY. JOINING INTERNATIONAL BRIGADES TOMORROW. BLAU.

There was a long pause, then both men said, "You're *not!*"

Ben nodded. "Tomorrow. In Albacete."

"Are you nuts?"

"Whatta you wanna do, get *killed?*"

"Probably, to the first question," said Ben, smiling at Dolores. "No, to the second."

"Now look here, lad," said Elliman. "We're all partisans of the Republic here. Do you doubt it?" Ben shook his head. *"Your* getting into it isn't going to make the slightest difference."

"It will to me," said Ben. He looked at the big man and smiled. "Didn't you drive an ambulance in the World War?"

"That was different," said Clem.

"Why?"

"You bet your life it'll make a difference," said Zav. "If you're lucky you'll only get a leg blown off. How old *are* you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Too old," said Clem, shaking his head and trying to drink whiskey at the same time. He gave it up and said, "I was nineteen when I joined the French ambulance."

Zav sat on the small sofa next to Ben and took his arm. "Colleague," he said. "Listen to me, colleague. You can do a hell of a lot more for Spain by writing what you see than you can as a soldier in the Brigade."

"I don't think so," said Ben. "You know what's happening. The situation's much worse than the government admits. Every available man's needed. I learned at IB headquarters today that they're even scouring the rear for anything they can get. The thing right now is to resist."

"Resistir es vencer," Elliman intoned in the Voice of Command, and added, "I ask myself."

"How can you ask yourself?" said Dolores, flaring. "Do you doubt that we'll win?"

Elliman sobered up for a moment and stared at her with his intense blue eyes. "I hope so, *guapa.* I think so, *sure* I think so. But I won't make book on it."

"Perdón?"

"How can anybody say?" said Elliman, pitiably.

"We can say *this,"* said Dolores with passion. "If we can resist

long enough there may be a change in the international situation. Nothing less than that is required to win. And the international situation *can* change."

"I agree," said Ben. "We can change it."

"A pair of babes in the woods," said Elliman, reaching for his bottle.

"Ben," said Zav, pressing his arm. "Listen to me, my young friend. You're twenty-eight. I'm thirty-eight. You're a *writer*. Anybody can pull a trigger. Few men can use the pen as a weapon. It's *important*."

"Of course it's important," said Ben, "but right now, right here, the trigger's more important. Do you doubt it?"

"This is a selfish decision you're making," said Zav. "Believe me. I know people. It's self-indulgent; it's romantic. It's Don Quixote all over again."

"We're not fighting windmills today," said Dolores.

"No sense o' humor," said Elliman, more to himself than to anybody else. "It isn't raining rain at-all, it's raining vi-o-lets."

"You're doing it for your own personal gratification," said Zav. "You have some cockeyed idea that it will make a man of you, or something."

Ben laughed. "You're off the beam, Doctor Freud," he said. "I have reasons to believe I *am* a man, or a reasonable facsimile thereof. But I'm sick of sitting on the sidelines. I'm sick of observing. Of this phony objectivity. Of *slumming,* really. I can't take any more of it. I can't *look* at another squashed apartment house. I can't take any more mangled children lying in rows on the street."

"*C'est la guerre,*" said Elliman, into the neck of his bottle.

"This is my fight," said Ben. "I *know* it is. I've been all over the lot in the last six months. And what I've seen hasn't only sickened me, it's angered me to the point where I couldn't even look myself in the face another twenty-four hours if I didn't do everything I could to help."

"Granted, *hombre,* granted," said Clem. "We're all helping as bes' we can, *camarada.* Dolores helps in her office. Zav 'n I write like mad. A lotta what we write gets through. Maybe more than *you,* but that's only 'cause we're better known. Important thing is, your words reach *millions.* Your rifle won' hit more than three or four, if you hit that many. Takes hun'erds a rounds t' kill one soldier. Sad."

"That's three or four less fascists," said Ben.

"I give up," said Elliman. "If the man wants t' kill himself, who'm I t' stop him, *me cago en Dios?*"

"He doesn't want to kill himself," Lang said bitterly. "He thinks

he wants to *live*. He thinks . . . oh, who the hell *cares* what he thinks?"

He caught Dolores' eyes and was suddenly contrite. He said gently, "What do *you* think, Dolores? You're Spanish. He wants to fight for you. Do you think he's needed? Wouldn't he be throwing his life away?"

Dolores said, "If I believed in God I would say, God bless him. All I can say is . . . " She didn't say anything, but got up from her chair and went to Ben and kissed him on the cheek.

He blushed like a girl.

5

November 7, 1947

By the time Lang got down to University Place from Dr. Morton's office it was almost six o'clock. The traffic, he thought, was becoming more congested every day. One of these days it was going to be impossible to drive in New York City. Then it would be time to move to Bucks County for good.

Anne told him that Peggy O'Brien, the secretary he had imported from Hollywood the year before, had already left. Anne had been sitting at the piano playing a Scarlatti sonata but rose immediately when he opened the door and came swiftly to him.

"What happened, Frank?"

He took her by both shoulders, looked her straight in the eyes, and said, "Later. Did Peggy leave any messages?"

"I didn't look," she said. "You know the people will be here by seven." He made a face. "Happy Birthday," she said and kissed him.

"Birthdays are a bore," he said. "Have to take a bath. I feel unclean! Unclean!"

"But what did they *want,* Frank?" she persisted, frowning as he turned away. She had been waiting all day to find out what the committee had asked Lang and had even kept the radio turned on in case there should be a news-break.

"The usual," he said as he disappeared into his study, which was also the room he lived and slept in.

The note on his desk in Peggy's precise typing on the electric machine read:

1. AP, UP called (Messers Fitch and Burden), want you to call back (4 p.m., 4:05 p.m., respectively).

2. The Sponsor wants you to call him the moment you come in (called 4:15).
3. You must begin work on broadcast by tomorrow, Saturday, morning at latest. If you need me, I am always available; (he smiled).
4. A man (anonymous) called (4:30 p.m.), said, "Tell the dirty Jew bastard to go back to Russia where he come from." (The d.J.b. is presumably you. I told him you came from Seattle, Washington);
5. You forgot to leave your secretary's pay-check (No hurry.)

—M. O'B., 5 p.m., 11-7-47

Lang went to the cabinet, opened it, poured a straight brandy and swallowed it. I'm going to stop patronizing that head shrinker, he thought. I can feel it coming on. Gives me the creeps with his endless "Mmmm," the pursed lips, the gaze that seems to say, You may think you can conceal it from me but you can't conceal it from me because there's nothing about you that I don't know. To hell with him.

The *World-Telegram* was on his desk, folded and marked with red pencil on the split-page, where the headline read:

NOTED WRITER
QUESTIONED BY
'RED' PROBERS

Lang read the story and said aloud, "The snide bastards." Doing a colleague like that. Pundit! he thought. That's a word you apply to Walter Lippmann. Simple enough to explain, he thought. There isn't a reporter alive who doesn't want to get away from pounding a beat and do what I have done.

He undressed, carefully hanging his clothes in the closet, placing his shoes on the shelf. Tuxedo, no less, he thought, and cursed the thought of it. Why the hell does a man have to be uncomfortable to entertain guests, birthday or no birthday?

The brandy had warmed him and he wanted another but decided to postpone it till after the bath. He went to the bathroom off his study, pulling the telephone after him on its long Hollywood cord, and setting it on the stool next to the tub.

The water was steaming hot, the way he liked it, and he inserted one toe (made an agonized face) then followed it inch by tortured inch with his long legs and body.

Dialing the private number at Bert Flax's home, Lang lay back waiting for him to answer. He wondered idly whether Flax was going to be difficult about this committee business, but decided

he wouldn't. Lang's Hooper rating was way up. What the hell was there to worry about?

"Flax," came the clipped voice and Lang replied as he invariably did, "Linseed oil."

He heard Flax laugh and say, "Well you dirty Red, why don't you go back to Seattle where you came from?"

"Hi, Bert," he said. "Are the customers annoying you?"

"Not yet. But you might tell me what's cooking."

"Nothing to stew about," said Lang. "The usual. Am I now or have I ever was?"

"Why pick on *you*?"

"Why pick on anybody? If FDR were alive, he'd have been subpoenaed by now, too."

"Sure, but he's dead, and I don't have to worry about the customers with him."

"You said they weren't riding you, though some son of a bitch called up here already, my girl tells me."

"Are they likely to have you in a public session?"

"I doubt it. And I'll make sure they don't."

"How?"

"I'm going to blast the bejesus out of them on the program Sunday."

"The hell you are."

"Why not?"

"I'd like to see that script, Zav."

"You know I don't submit scripts, Bert," Lang said, somewhat annoyed. "It's in my contract."

"I know your contract, Zav. I wrote it myself."

"So what're you flipping your lid about?"

"I'm not. Do what you think best, but I don't think it's a good idea for you to attack the Committee, especially since nobody knows what they asked you or what you answered."

"I'll *tell* 'em, you poor goon," said Zav.

"Think it's a good idea?"

"Look, Bert. You've been a public relations man all your life. I have some experience in the field myself, you know. *L'attaque, toujours l'attaque!* They've bit off more than they can chew."

"We'll talk about it later, Zav," said Flax.

"Later?"

"Sure. I'm coming to your birthday party, or didn't Anne tell you?"

"Defend me from my sponsor," Zav shouted into the phone. "I can defend myself from my friends."

"You sound pretty chipper."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not," said Zav, suddenly dropping his voice in mock sorrow. "Man O'War died last week at the age of thirty and I haven't got over it yet. He was a particular friend of mine."

He heard Flax chuckling and hung up the receiver. It was a good enough exit-line and he liked an exit-line, just as he liked to hang up before anyone could say Goodbye.

He began to think of the broadcast while soaping with the hard-milled soap of which he had more than a gross of bars in the bath-room closet. He was delighted to find that entire paragraphs flowed through his mind effortlessly.

This is the same mindless outfit, he would say, *that branded Shirley Temple a Communist dupe—she was six years old at the time—that asked Hallie Flanagan, the director of the Federal Theatre, 'Who is this Christopher Marlowe? Is he a Communist?' The question, quite aside from its unconscious humor, is a hallmark of the committee's mentality. It is more than that. It is an index of the vicious anti-intellectualism that characterizes fascists everywhere and was summed up for all time in the infamous phrase: 'When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun.' These modern troglodytes* (maybe that word is too special, he thought, primitives would be better) *primitives are after nothing less than . . .* He reached for the pad and pencil on the stool next to the tub and started to write.

From beyond two doors he could still hear Anne working away at the Scarlatti and he paused for a moment, thought of calling Peggy, then decided not to. There was nothing he had to say that couldn't be said tomorrow when he brought her the paycheck. He continued writing and stuck with it till there was a knock on the bathroom door. He frowned.

"Yes?"

"Have you gone down the drain, Frank?" Anne said.

"Not yet."

"The guests will be here pretty soon. It's nearly seven."

"The guests," he said, "can go screw. I'm working."

"Frank."

"Come in," he said, "and bring me a brandy and soda."

He heard her mixing the drink in his study and modestly floated the wash-cloth over his genitals.

"With ice!" he shouted.

When she came in with the drink in hand, he looked at her and said, "You've got that expression again."

She smiled and said, "I can't help it, Frank."

"The head shrinker tells me alcoholism resists psychoanalysis."

"You're not an alcoholic, Frank."

"You should live so long."

"You're not going to drink tonight."

"If you start suggesting me that way, pie-face, I will drink myself into insensibility in three easy lessons. This is lesson one."

"Frank, please."

"How long have you lived with me, Mrs. Lang?" he asked, reaching for the glass. The wash-cloth floated off and he swiftly retrieved it, remembering with amusement a phrase he had read—where was it, in Faulkner or Joyce?—about a "languid floating flower."

"Long enough to know better," she said with a smile.

"Then you should know that the best way to get me to do something is to tell me *not* to do it."

"That's pretty childish, Frank."

"Certainly it is!" he shouted and took a gulp of the drink. "I'm a *child.* What do you and Everett do, talk about me every day on the phone before I get there? There ought to be at least *one* child in the family."

At that, tears sprang to her eyes and she started out of the bathroom and Lang cried, "Come back! I apologize. You know I didn't mean that. It's not your fault . . . "

"It is," she said quietly at the door, her back still turned. "We've been through this all before. There's nothing wrong with *you.*" (Was it Faulkner or was it Joyce, damn it? he wondered.)

"Annie," he said, holding out one hand. "Take my hand." She shook her head but turned to look at him. "Come on," he said, "hold my hand, even if it's wet." She came to him, reluctantly took his hand and moving the telephone to the floor, she sat on the stool.

"Annie," he said, "get the idea out of your head once and for all that I hold anything against you for the barrenness of this marriage. If it's anything at all, it's a symbol of my own sterility—on more than one level."

"Don't talk like that, Frank," she said quietly.

"Can't you call me Zav?"

"No, Zav," she said. "I don't like the sound of it. We've been through that before, too. Please tell me about the Committee. What did they want?"

(It could be Faulkner or it could be Joyce, he thought, they were enough alike to be two peas in a pod.)

"Pee in a pot," he said.

"What?"

He laughed. "I was thinking of something," he said, then made an effort to be serious. "They want publicity," he said. "They're

in the headline-making business. I'm the celebrated author of five flop plays, the famous radio commentator, book-writer, double-dome, this and that. I was in Spain and was in favor of Spain. That was a mortal, not a venial sin. These characters are not of the Faithful, but they do My Father's bidding. Ten years after the event."

"What did you tell them?"

"Off," he said, and she looked puzzled. "I told them off. They won't bother me again."

"The paper says they're keeping you under subpoena."

"Who cares?" he said. "They are. What else could they do? But I don't think they'll tackle me under the Kleig lights. My dear public wouldn't stand for it . . . " He held out the glass. "I need a refill."

She looked at him and he said firmly, "Do you get it for me, or do I get it myself?"

She sighed and took the glass and as she left the bath-room he knew—of course, it was Joyce. The whole phrase came to him immediately: *He saw his trunk and limbs riprippled over and sustained, buoyed lightly upward, lemonyellow: his navel, bud of flesh: and saw the dark tangled curls of his bush floating, floating hair of the stream around the limp father of thousands, a languid floating flower.*

Father of *nothing!* he thought, and said, "I'm coming out," stepped out of the tub and wrapped himself in an enormous towel and walked into the study, where Anne turned with the drink in hand.

"Drink with me," he said, taking the glass, and she shook her head.

"I say, drink *with* me. I'll develop a sense of humor in you, pie-face, if I have to kill you in the process."

"I want you to have your present before the people come," she said and walked over to his desk where there was a handsomely wrapped package lying under the desk-lamp. (Limp father of nothing . . . if you don't count that girl in Kokomo, Indiana, who extorted five hundred bucks for an abortion and . . .)

"Did you ever hear the story," he said as Anne turned with the package in hand. Then he said, "Excuse me . . . "

"No," she said with a smile. "Tell the story."

He took the package from her and walked back to the desk with it. "About Jacob Adler, the famous J—famous actor. He had a reputation for fathering any number of illegitimate kids

all over the country, in addition to the numerous brood he had within the bonds of Holy Matrimony."

Anne thought, Again? but smiled as though she had not heard the story fifty times.

"Well," said Zav, untying the ribbons carefully, "it was in Kokomo, Indiana, or some such place, where he was sitting in a café and a young fellow came up and said, 'Are you Jacob Adler?' Adler nodded.

" 'Jacob Adler, the *actor*?' said the young man, and Adler nodded again.

" 'Well,' says the young man . . . " (Zav put the package down, the better to act out the role.) " 'Well,' says the young man with indignation. 'I'm your *son!*' "

" 'So?' says Adler. 'Sit down. *Have* something.' "

Lang roared, opening the wrappings and the box inside, glanced at the handsome lounging jacket, looked at Anne and said gently, "It's beautiful."

He came to her and took her in his arms thinking, *The horse-leach had two daughters, crying, Give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied... The grave, and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water . . . Ecclesiastes.*

"It was very sweet and generous of you," he said, holding her, thinking, it set her back a good hundred bucks if it cost a penny.

She looked up at him and said, "Frank, are you worried about the committee?"

"Of course not," he said. "Bunch of hack politicos." He released her and took up the glass that he had placed on the desk, drained it. The towel fell off and he wrapped it around himself again.

"Scram out of here, Annie," he said, "If you don't want me to come to dinner in my birthday suit." Then he noticed her dinner dress and said, "Is that another birthday present?"

"It took you long enough to notice it," she said, turning before him like a model.

"I never notice women's clothes," he said, bowing. "Only the women *in* the clothes. 'How beautiful is the Princess Salomé tonight,' " he added. "If I keep on like this I can hire myself out as a dictionary of quotations. Like Bartlett."

When she looked puzzled he said, "All kinds of quotations have been buzzing through my head all day. Driving me fruit. None from Lang, but lots of quotations from Faulkner, Joyce, Ecclesiastes, Oscar Wilde and Dolores." He saw the expression on her face and

added quickly, "La Pasionaria. The committee even threw the name of the play up to me as proof of my subversive nature."

"I'm worried about the committee, Frank," she said. "They cited those Hollywood people and . . . "

"Forget it," he said. "You never looked more beautiful, as Louella says."

She wanted to ask how the session with Dr. Morton had gone but thought better of it. The only response she ever got to that question was a mocking imitation of Everett, the way he pursed his lips, the way he said, "Mmmm," and a general dissertation on the futility of continuing in analysis.

"Hurry, Frank," she said. "I just heard the bell."

As she left the room, Zav picked up the bottle and took a long slug from it, set it down, filled a glass with water from the pitcher and drank it off. You're drunk, he said to himself, and was amazed again, for the *n*th time, how little it took to set him off.

Why are you drunk tonight? he asked himself. The committee? The radio program and what might happen to it? Or is it the simple fact that you cannot bring yourself to pack this handsome lounging jacket in the airplane luggage, together with all the other junk you have, and walk right out of here, singing, "So long, it was (*no*) good to know you"?

How many years have you been brooding about walking out and not doing it, and what's holding you back? There's nothing wrong with *you,* she said. Well, on that score, she was right. He had had his semen examined, not once but three times, and the spermatozoa were motile as all hell. But the remark had all the earmarks of a dirty dig.

There's nothing wrong with you, Lang, he said to himself as he dressed, that a first-class suicide won't cure. He decided that if he got through with the script in time the next day, he would run out to Teterboro and take the plane for a hop. Maybe take Peggy along. That girl was cute, all right. There was no aerobatic maneuver he could put the ship through that made her turn a hair: spins, Cuban 8's, snap-rolls or Immelmans. She laughed with delight and shouted, More! more! like some little kid being tossed in the air by its daddy.

Daddy! Yoo-hoo, daddy! He staggered as he walked to the bureau, took out the boiled shirt and tried to force the studs through the starched holes. Are you my daddy? she keeps saying. Daddy, where are you now? he wondered, dead and lying on your back through all eternity. He shuddered. When *I* die, he thought, I will leave a

codicil in my will that will invalidate it unless I'm buried on my belly.

Maybe you better write your will, he decided, if you're going to die so soon. Who said anything about soon, Lang? Did Morton plant that idea in your head this afternoon when you were telling him how much you liked to fly? Fly. Die. Die. Fly. Come Josephine in my dying machine.

All dressed up, he thought, looking at himself in the full-length mirror, and no place to go. Where would you *like* to go, Saint Francis Xavier, and where *wouldn't* you like to go? Anywhere out of the world. *N'importe ou, hors du monde,* Mr. Bartlett. Why not think up some quotations of your own for a change?

Tomorrow. Tomorrow is another day and I will put all the quotations in the radio-script and wrap them around the committee's ears. Only they will not be Faulkner-Joyce-Wilde-Ecclesiastes-Louella Parsons or whoever. They will be pure unadulterated Francisco Javier Lang. *Dolores, where are you, Dolores?* He took another swift brandy and opened the rolling doors of his study like an actor making an entrance on a stage.

The stage was already set and he flipped open the silver cigarette case, took out a cigarette (it was stale) and felt for his lighter and could not find it. He did find a book of matches from the Stork and lit one, lit the cigarette with some effort and walked across the room toward the huge couch, where Anne was sitting with Bert Flax and his wife and another guy whose face looked familiar.

"Your face's familiar," he said to the stranger and handed the burnt match carefully to Anne. "You may have this," he said. "I've only used it once."

Flax got up with an embarrassed grin and held out his hand. "How are you, you dirty Red you?" said Lang and heard Flax introduce the young man, but didn't catch the name. He bowed from the waist to Flax's wife, Berenice and said, "What beautiful white breasts you have tonight, my dear. It's an old joke. Remind me to tell it to you some time."

"Lift that wing," said Flax (who had been an Army pilot) and Zav said, "*You* need a drink." He looked around vaguely, saw the man hired from the caterer and waved to him. "Bring up the replacements, Colonel," he said, and when the man reached them, he took a highball from the tray and handed it to Flax.

"Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish," he quoted, "an' wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him *drink!*" he cried loudly, "an' forget his poverty, an' remember his misery no more. That's Ecclesiastes again," he added, and took Flax by the arm.

"D' you know my ol' pal 'cclesiastes? I was goin' t' suggest that you ink him in, as *Variety* puts it, as a replacement f'r me this summer. The man's terrific. Writes his own material, too."

Flax looked at Anne, who rose from the couch and came toward him. *"My,"* said Zav, "how you have grown, m' turtle-dove, m' pie-face. Or d' you have a twin sister, *me cago en Dios?"*

"Frank," she said, "I'll get you some coffee."

"Y' know," said Lang, "I don' think I c'n take much more o' this. Man O' War died las' week, and they called *him* Big Red, too."

6

November 7, 1947

Blau had spoken enough in public so that it sometimes happened that even as he was speaking, his mind would follow its own bent, contemplate the audience before him and make comments on it. Now he was near the conclusion of his talk to the Workers' Lodge on Flatbush Avenue.

"We must understand that the ostensible reason for the investigation of Hollywood," he was saying, "has nothing whatsoever to do with its real design: to terrorize the progressive spokesmen of the people, drive them from the mass communication industries and achieve conformity of opinion.

"This is precisely how it was done in Germany around the time that Hitler came to power. A handful of motion picture artists, all of them distinguished, were publicly labeled Communists, driven from the industry. Not even ten of them!

"The rest were silenced, for fear that the same thing would happen to them. After that it was simple enough for the Nazis to take over the industry, see to it that nothing was made that did not meet with the entire approval of the propaganda minister, Herr Goebbels . . ."

As he spoke, Ben's eyes roved the audience. The hall was less than half filled. Maybe there were forty-seven people. Most of them seemed middle-aged. So many of them looked permanently defeated that Ben wondered what they were doing there.

What did they care about the movies? Ben asked himself as he continued. Few of them ever went. What could they really *do* about them if they cared? It had never been possible to organize audiences in the United States, to get people together to take a

stand against corrupt and reactionary content, to protest effectively and hit the producers where it really hurt them—in the boxoffice.

The people in the hall were polite. They listened. Maybe they just want to get out of the rain, Ben thought bitterly. Maybe they have no place else to go. Maybe they're really interested in what I'm saying and *want* to do something about it.

It was a cold and rainy night. The hall was chill and draughty. There was that smell about it that you find in all similar places: the smell of age, of fatigue, of hopelessness and poverty.

Ben tried to compensate for what he was feeling by punching up his closing remarks. They must defend the men who had been pilloried in Washington a month before. They must get out and talk to their friends. They must understand that the movies—in the hands of the outright reactionaries—would be used to condition the American people as they had been used to condition the Germans.

He was paraphrasing here a speech made to the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade by one of the Hollywood men who was himself a veteran and who had flown up from Washington during the investigation to speak at a dinner meeting of the Spanish Refugee Committee and to the vets.

"What we are seeing," Ben said, "is the beginning of a concerted campaign to regiment the American people. When I was in the Army, many of the GI's used to reflect what we all heard from our superior officers. 'When this war's over,' they said, 'we're going to have to fight the Russians.'

"Now we know that that concept didn't originate with the military brass; we know where it originated. It originated with the very same forces who were behind the non-intervention policy in Spain, behind the refusal of our own government to lift the embargo on arms for Spain."

He analyzed the connection between these seemingly remote events—the strangulation of the Spanish Republic, the anti-Soviet propaganda during the very time when the USA and the Soviet Union were allied, the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, and, a year before that, Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri, where the brandy-soaked old man lifted a phrase from Goebbels himself ("the Iron Curtain") and made it his own.

There was cordial applause as Ben concluded and sat down. He felt cold and unhappy. He felt lonely and defeated. Why don't you marry Sue Menken and get it over with? he thought. Yeah? he said to himself, even if you don't love her?

Why don't you love her, pinhead? (She loves you.) You don't love her because you feel inadequate, that's why; because you

don't think you've got enough to give her in return for what she gives to you. (Or are you still carrying a torch for Ellen?)

The woman who was the chairman of the meeting stood behind the podium on her tiny feet and addressed the audience. "Brothers and sisters," she said, "if this lodge of ours is to perform its function, we have to take up a collection."

That was sweet and to the point, Ben thought, sitting in the hard chair behind her. How much would it be this time? (Not much.)

"We need money for the rent of the hall, to pay our wonderful speaker (our wonderful speaker! Ben thought), to put out leaflets. We need money for a rainy day."

She paused, lifted her arms. Ben could hear the rain beating on the window panes of the ancient place, the wind howling around the beat-up walls of the wooden building.

"Brothers and sisters," she said, "this is a rainy day."

The total effect brought tears to Ben's eyes and he wondered why. Was it because we are so few and they are so many? (But that's not true, his mind said. It's exactly the opposite.) Is it because the people are not really organized, are scattered, dispersed?

Or is it because you yourself are overcome with a sense of total futility, as you have been so often since you came out of the base hospital? Vanzetti's words came to his mind as though Vanzetti himself were standing behind him on the platform, speaking them:

If it had not been for this thing, I might have live out my life, talking on street corners to scorning men. I might have die, unmarked, unknown, a failure...

The woman was saying, "Good night, goodbye, and thank you." The two ushers had handed up the baskets and the woman was counting the collection, her back to Ben. He stood up and waited for her to turn around. Another day, another dollar, he thought. This hand to mouth existence is a bore. Ten bucks from the *Daily* for a feature story; maybe twenty from *Mainstream* for an occasional article; neither could afford, at the moment, to take him on as a staff member.

"Brother Blau," the woman said, her face frowning, "we promised you twenty dollars, but we can only make it ten."

"It's OK," said Ben.

"The rain," she said. "You know how people are. We usually get at least sixty, seventy-five people. I'm sorry."

"Forget it," said Ben. "It was a pleasure."

"I hope you'll come again. Our people enjoyed it."

"Of course," he said, struggling into the trench coat he had bought in the officers' PX. This damned thing, he thought, makes

me look like an Irish Republican Army man in "The Informer." (Or a gangster.)

Outside the wind was vicious and he pulled the coat closer around his body, jammed the old felt hat down on his head, shoved his hands into the deep pockets. He started walking to the subway a good three blocks away, thinking it's a long way home to Fifteenth Street and what? (Home is where you hang your head.)

He began to think of the Hollywood vet who had spoken to the guys last month. The man had been ill at ease. His good Hollywood clothes, the expensive chronograph he was wearing had set him apart from the other guys, many of whom had come to the meeting in work clothes.

How long will the Hollywood clothes last? Ben wondered. How long before he'll have to hock the chronograph and the silver identification bracelet he was wearing on his other wrist?

They'll skid him out of their little economic system on his butt, as they will the rest of the unfriendly witnesses. Just as you yourself were skidded out of it after you came back from Spain! (No use crying over spilt money, is there, Blau?)

But where do you come off feeling smug about that guy's clothes and the money he won't be earning any more? In your childhood and your adolescence, you never had to worry about eating, either. Pop had more than enough and to spare. Or are you still feeling guilty that you broke away from your family and your class and tried unconsciously to proletarianize yourself before history did it for you?

At the subway station Ben bought a copy of the *World-Telegram* and tucked it under his arm. He shook the rain off his hat, turned down the collar of his coat. What a dismal night it was! But you tried hard enough, didn't you? You thought a year as a bindle stiff, picking berries, working in the Ford plant two weeks before they canned you, picking lettuce in the Salinas Valley would make a worker of you. You thought a year at sea as an ordinary in the stinking foc'sle of an America-France freighter with the lousy conditions that existed in 1928 would make a proletarian of you.

The train came. It was 10:45 at night and the car was practically empty. He sat down with the paper still folded under his arm. Sure, sure, he thought, you were young enough to be romantic. You'd read Wasserman's *The World's Illusion* and were ready to give your worldly goods to the poor and move into the slums. But instead you came back to the middle class and became a "professional," filing clippings in the morgue of the *New York World.*

And you advanced to marking the paper for the other filing clerks. And then began the spectacular Rise of Benjamin Blau—

to cub reporter, to the police shack, to city-side assignments, to a By-Line! You were going great guns, weren't you, despite the folding of the *World* and the two years of odd jobs? You landed on the *Globe-Times*. You might even have become a Francis X. Lang and written the Great American Novel like all newspapermen *don't*.

And what the hell are you tormenting yourself for now? Are you sorry you picked your side and stuck to it? Ben suddenly remembered something he had intended to say, or maybe he had said it but hadn't hammered the point home: "The German movie industry," he had intended to say, "from that day on produced nothing but films glorifying sex, violence and murder. Day after day, night after night, the German people absorbed this poison, conditioning themselves without even knowing it to an acceptance of anti-human values, violence and fascism and eventual war."

Ah, well, that always happened.

What's really eating you tonight, Blau, he said to himself as the subway dived under the East River and the familiar sound was heard, is the fact that the American people don't see what's going on, are basically uninterested in politics, aren't ready to do anything about the things they may not like. What's worrying you is the fact that we don't have a party of the working class such as they have in France and Italy today.

You're a genius, Blau! If there's a gloomy side to any given situation, you can be counted on to be the first to see it and to harp on it. That's why you've had so many arguments with the comrades on the *Daily* and the old *New Masses*. But damn it all, he thought, sometimes some of these characters give me a pain in the ass. They always see the positive aspects of every situation. They always know exactly what the balance of forces is at any given moment. The hell they *do!*

Where were they when I was in the Army? They were in Earl Browder's pocket, that's where they were. They swallowed the pill Mike Gold wrote was too big for the horse to swallow. (*You* never did.) They were talking about a progressive capitalism that would gradually develop into socialism! They could foresee a day when the fat boys would say, "OK, kids, we can't run it any more. *You* take over."

OK, so feel smug about *that* one, too. See what I mean? Only Blau is Perfect. Only Blau knows—maybe by instinct, huh—what the correct evaluation of any phenomenon should yield. That's why only Blau can afford to indulge in moods of pessimism, defeatism, and today too! (The trouble with you, Blau, is you need a *job!*)

He was looking at the paper. It was November 7. November 7

you pick to decide you are Vanzetti, talking your life away in bare, unheated halls to the uncomprehending, the impotent, the defeated! What the hell does Sue see in you anyhow? She could have the pick of the crop any day of any week. (What did Ellen think she saw in you, for that matter?)

November 7. A good day to be gloomy, he thought bitterly. The anniversary, how many years? Thirty. The anniversary, too, of the defense of Madrid, eleven years. The double anniversary that had proved for all time what people were capable of when they knew what was what and were determined to do something about it—*that's* the day you pick to decide that the people will never do it again!

And where the hell do you come off condescending to the people who listened to you tonight? Came in to get out of the rain! They spent their hard-earned money to listen, didn't they? They came because they had the cockeyed idea that you might be able to tell them something useful. And you condescend to them! You—a man who believes what you believe, who has been through the mill, who fought a war—two wars—and came to *your* conclusions, and you can still permit yourself to look down on the very people for whom you claim to be fighting! He sighed.

He turned to the split page and saw the headline:

NOTED WRITER
QUESTIONED BY
'RED' PROBERS

Zav couldn't cut much ice these days, he thought, if he only rated a couple sticks of type on the split page. Funny thing. There was a time when almost anything he said or did or any lousy play he wrote rated at least a column.

The newspaper story was uninformative. Lang had appeared in executive session. All he would say to the newspapermen was that he had appeared, which they knew anyhow. Beyond that, "No comment," like any diplomat.

Well, you could say this much for him: so far he hadn't done any public red-baiting, hadn't spilled his guts in the *New Republic* like Granville Hicks, Louis Fischer or even Vincent Sheean or any of those birds who had decided the tide was coming in and maybe they had better keep their feet dry. He wondered if *Flaxlax,* Lang's sponsor, would fire him.

But how the hell do you *know* what he told the committee? Or why they called him? Then suddenly Ben remembered that there was a good chance Sue might turn up again tonight. He got up

and walked to the vestibule of the car. (No, it was too late.) Union Square.

The train stopped and he got out, started walking toward the north end of the long platform.

A pretty girl passed and the thought occurred to Ben, nobody looking at you would think you were the author of a book that was distributed in a hundred thousand copies, that was given a full-page review in the *New York Times* book section by Lang himself. (That got published because Lang dropped a bug in his publisher's ear.) *Volunteer for Liberty,* by Benjamin Blau, sold fifteen hundred copies in a trade edition, a hundred thousand distributed in an Armed Services Edition, for which you got what? About seven hundred bucks. No, less than that. (And spent it on your mother's funeral.)

It was still raining when Ben came out on Fifteenth Street and started walking east. The wind whipped him and he hunched his shoulders.

The war's over, Blau, he thought. Stop feeling so God-damned special. Reconvert. Two wars are over for you and even if the boys would like to start another, what with Truman's doctrine and the business in Greece and all the whoop-de-doo the papers were making about the Cominform, they're not going to *get* another war—at least for a time they're not.

In Spain you came out with a whole skin; in Germany you got clipped, but good. In a new one you'd be atomized. Try the Blau Atomizer, he thought. Inspire Passion. Women Swoon for Blau.

What are you beating yourself over the head for, like any lousy bourgeois intellectual? (Because it feels so good when you stop?) Do you *have* to be a split personality for the rest of your life? *Are* you a split personality? Do you *really* regret you didn't keep your *Globe* byline and rise to the eminent post of Distinguished Foreign Correspondent, with all that the title implies?

He let himself into the vestibule of the rooming house, having looked in his mailbox tacked outside (there was nothing in it). And then he saw Mrs. Hornstein standing in her doorway. He walked rapidly to her, took her hand and kissed it gallantly.

"Mrs. Hornstein," he said, "I love you."

She snatched back her hand as though it had been burned, shoved him and giggled. "You're two weeks behind," she said and he shook his head in mock despair.

"Money," he said, "is the opium of the working class."

"What?"

He fished in his pocket, saw her face break into a wide smile,

then collapse like an accordion when she saw the five-dollar bill he put into her outstretched hand.

"Two weeks, twenty dollars," she said. He nodded. "I know," he said. "How well I know."

He turned and walked slowly up the stairs, thinking, Maybe I ought to call up old Francis Xavier Lang and maybe I shouldn't. You thrashed it all out in 1939 and again only last year. It's done, over, *kaput, fini, terminado,* washed up and down the drain.

You'll have to stop thinking of yourself as a liaison man between the middle class and the working class and stick to your knitting, to mix a metaphor.

And you'll have to do more than that, he thought, as he unlocked the door and snapped on the light. You're thirty-seven years old, a veteran of two wars, a trained writer. If the *Daily* can't hire you or *Mainstream* or the *Freiheit,* you canvass every trade union paper in the country that might be interested in a guy with your qualifications. You call on every organization that might need a public relations man and would be willing to hire you. And if you can't find a writing job, you go into a factory and *become* a worker.

You don't live from hand to mouth like this. There are plenty of jobs to be had for a man with your history—yes even your radical history—your training and experience. If you've been skidded out of the economic system, you fight your way back into it again by tooth and claw.

(And you don't call up Francis Lang, either. Besides, what with the committee and the subpoena hanging over his head, you would be the last man in New York he would want to see right now.)

He moved toward the radio-phonograph and even searched for an album before he remembered how late it was and how many times Mrs. Hornstein (and the other roomers) had eaten him out for playing the phonograph late at night. (You learn how to live with other people.)

He sat down in the ancient swivel chair he had bought at a second-hand store on Sixth Avenue and stared at the wall. He hadn't taken off his trench coat or the pre-war hat. He missed the Spanish poster every time he looked at the wall. What had ever become of it?

When he enlisted in 1941 he had left it with Ellen, and he had never had the guts to ask her to return it. 1938, he thought, *Año de la Victória!*

7

April 30, 1938

Three weeks after Elliman, Dolores and Lang had heard Ben Blau say he was going to join the Brigade, Zav got Dolores to organize another car for him and drove west through Cataluña.

He was still rankling with the peculiar sense of frustration that Clem's enormous size, energy and noise always created in him.

It was an old thing about Clem, Zav thought as he drove. I'm no shrimp myself. Lang was five eleven and a half, a good hundred and seventy pounds of bone and reasonably firm muscle. He was considered handsome and had the melting brown eyes that invariably attract women, with their implication of secret melancholy.

It was absurd, Lang felt, to be jealous of Clem so far as Dolores Muñoz was concerned. Clem liked women who at least approximated his own heroic stature. He liked them "well-upholstered," as he put it, with long legs, long blonde hair and "big knockers."

It was the opposite with Lang. He liked women who were small, at least a foot shorter than he was himself, who were slim in the hips and actually, if you wanted to be snide about it, were built more like adolescent boys than grown women.

Odd that I should have married Anne, he thought. Or is it odd? She approximated the Elliman ideal, not the Lang. (I must send a cable, as soon as...) But Dolores...He thought of her and wished she were along, but since the retreats Constancia's press bureau had been swamped with foreign correspondents, like buzzards wheeling over a dying calf on the desert, and her work was so exacting that she had little time for him. I'll change that when I get back, Lang thought, and stepped on the accelerator. (Blau sure made an impression on her, though.)

The hairpin roads that wound through the mountains of Cataluña were fantastic. There was barely room for a single car to pass but the Spanish military *choferes* who drove trucks through them never slowed down for curves. They didn't even slow down at night when they frequently had to drive without lights. Which might have accounted for the many wrecks he passed on the side of the road.

A guard posted at a cross road near the Ebro told him where he could find the *estado-mayor* of the XVth Brigade and when he drove up to it, a kilometer or so outside Mora la Nueva, he was astonished to find the Brigade commander Cópic, sitting outside

his headquarters with a guitar over his knees, singing in a rich tenor voice to an attentive group of staff men.

Cópic was Hungarian and it was said that he had been an opera singer. This was scarcely surprising in an army like this, which had developed commanders out of material that would have been laughed at in the advanced capitalist countries: quarrymen (Lister), woodworkers (Modesto), peasants, factory workers. Why not an opera singer when you had men like Ludwig Renn, the German novelist, and Merriman (apparently lost near Gandesa), who taught economics at the University of California?

Cópic was amazingly optimistic, Lang felt, considering the fact that he had lost a good portion of his Brigade and the fascists were in a fair way to cut the country in half, driving to the sea at Viñaroz. But perhaps the man's mood was as characteristic of this army as his guitar, his *Mittel Europa* operatic tenor and the prodigies the People's Army was performing in the face of the overwhelming matériel supplied to Franco by Mussolini and Hitler.

He got directions from the commander to the place where the Lincolns were supposed to be reorganizing and found it after a time. A narrow path ran downhill from the unpaved road to Darmos through terraced vine-fields that were still barren of leaves. Off the path were the inevitable *barrancas* that were called *arroyos* in the American southwest and owed their origin to the same natural phenomenon: sudden downpours on sandy soil unprotected by heavy vegetation.

In these miserable ditches a few men in wretched clothes that were supposed to be uniforms lay in the weak sun, fighting the flies, eating cans of bully-beef, smoking, sleeping, hunting lice in shirts and pants.

He saw Ben Blau immediately, and was completely astonished. Why, it was only three weeks ago that he left Barcelona! Ben waved at him. (He was an amazingly ugly bastard, Lang thought.) Lang waved back, but Blau didn't get up and Lang stepped off the path onto the crumbling gravel that led down into the *barranca*.

Ben was squatting next to a tall young man with enormous black handlebar mustaches who was wearing a long black opera cape that he was obviously using for two purposes: to keep warm in the diluted sunlight and to shoo the flies when they got too persistent. There were a couple of other men sitting around, too.

"Captain Busch," said Blau and the man with the mustaches put out his hand as Ben said, "Francis Lang." Busch apparently recognized the name and looked at Zav but said nothing. Disconcerted by the direct gaze Lang said stupidly, "I see you got back all right. We had lots of inquiries about you."

Busch nodded and Lang dropped into his role of foreign correspondent in self-defense. "How many men do you have now, captain?"

Busch said, "We had between five and six hundred when we went in. We can account for a hundred twenty so far. But there'll be more."

"Any word about Bob Merriman or Doran?"

"No."

Lang was trying to account to himself for the unmistakable awe he felt for this young man. Without the absurd *mostachos* he would look something like Lincoln, Zav thought He must have been all of twenty-three or four and was commanding a battalion whereas Lang was thirty-eight and...

"What's going on?" said Blau. "Some papers have finally come up, but they're over a week old."

"You know about the government," said Lang and the men nodded but he went right on. "Prieto's been canned as minister of defense..."

"About time," said Busch.

"...they're talking of Jesús Hernández to replace him. He may have the job by now, or Negrin may take it over himself. A new government of National Union's being formed."

"What about equipment?" one of the other men asked.

"There's a rumor Roosevelt told the French he would ship five hundred planes to France if Blum would pass them along."

A man looked up at Lang. "When we met you at Tortosa you said two hundred. Has the ante gone up or is this another rumor?"

Lang was uncomfortable. As an unofficial representative—to these men—of their own government, he felt curiously responsible for the failure of FDR to take any action. He shrugged.

Busch excused himself, saying he had to go up to Brigade and Lang tried as best he could to outline the situation for Blau and the other guys hanging around. He told them that the lines were holding —or supposed to be holding—and the fascists were even being pushed back in some sectors. (He was aware that he wanted to get Blau alone; he *had* to talk to him.)

"The Central Committee of the Communist Party," said Lang, "has promised that if the lines can hold for two weeks there will be enough material to start an offensive."

"Where?" said Blau.

"Where's the stuff coming from?" said another.

"Roosevelt won't send it," said the third. "The Church's too powerful."

Lang smiled and handed over his cigarettes, three of the four

packs he had in his pocket. Whenever he did this he wondered how long it would take him to get over the feeling of playing Lady Bountiful and the subsequent embarrassment he felt.

"Don't know where it will come from," he replied. "France or the Soviet Union. I agree with the comrade who doesn't have much faith in FDR, but let me tell you, it's not *his* fault. I know him."

"What's he like?" one man asked.

"A politician," said Lang, "but the man..."

"OK," said another. "You answered it." They all laughed but Lang felt obliged to defend the President. "You know, of course," he said, "that he donated five thousand bucks to equip an ambulance unit." They were silent. "After he saw the movie Hemingway made," Lang added.

"Where would the offensive be?" said Ben. "Do you know?"

"Up north. In the Balaguer-Tremp-Lérida sector. Those hydroelectric stations are crucial to all of Catalonia."

One man said, "Excuse me, I got the shits," and left. Lang suddenly remembered the other man's name, Joe Faber, the writer Elliman had recognized. He was a balding individual who seemed somewhat older than the other men, and wore a perpetual sourpuss.

"How are you, Joe?" he said, and Faber replied, "Great," still scowling.

"Doing any writing?"

"I keep a notebook," the man said. "For all the good that will do anyone."

"Come in handy writing that book," Lang smiled.

"I'll leave it to *you* to write the books," said Faber, and Blau laughed and said, "Don't mind Joe, he was born with a pickle in his mouth." But Faber's face unexpectedly lit up, and he said, "Lang, would you do me a favor?"

"Claro," said Lang. "Who do you want liquidated?"

Faber reached into his shirt pocket, brought out a notebook soaked in sweat and handed it to Lang. "That's filled up," he said. "I don't want to lose it. Will you mail it to an address in Philadelphia if I give it to you?"

Lang paused for a moment; he wondered about this, then he said, "Sure. I'm going up to Paris later this summer, if you're not in a hurry."

"No hurry," said Joe, "so long as it gets there." He tore a page out of a second notebook, brought out a pencil, wrote a few words and handed the sheet to Lang, then stood up. *"Hasta luego,"* he said and ambled off down the *barranca.*

Lang touched the pocket into which he had put Faber's notebook

and looked at Blau. "Anything in this that shouldn't go out?" he asked.

"I doubt it," said Ben. "Joe's a good guy. It's his literary soul at work. Wants to be sure posterity won't lose anything if he gets knocked off."

"To hell with *that,*" said Lang. "What I want to know is how the hell *you* got here." He suddenly noticed that Ben's "uniform" was relatively clean.

"I told you," said Ben. "I went to Albacete and enlisted."

"That was only three weeks ago," said Lang with amazement. "Didn't you get any training at *all?*"

"I told them about my National Guard experience."

"Do you *have* National Guard training?"

"Sure," said Ben, winking. "Six years of it."

Lang was unaccountably angry, but he said, "How about *you?* You're a writer, too. How do you feel about posterity?"

"Great," said Ben, "like Joe says. Only different. We have history on our side."

"You're sure of that." Lang smiled sadly.

"Aren't *you?*"

"No," said Lang. "Since history's made by people and since I'm not so sure I trust the animal."

Ben grinned. "How's Dolores?" he said, and Lang felt himself blush and was surprised.

"You sure made a hit with her," he said. "Is that why you signed up?"

"Scarcely," said Ben.

"I'm glad you like her," said Lang. "She's a Communist, too." That was a shot in the dark, but he had felt compelled to say it. And he added, "Aren't you?"

"No," said Ben. "Are the Communists the only people who hate fascism?" Lang shook his head and Ben said, "If this is an interview, Mr. Foreign Correspondent, I can assure you we have a hell of a lot of other men who're not."

Lang put out a protesting hand but Blau went right on. "That guy with dysentery, for example. He's a hard-shelled Republican from East Dorset, Vermont."

"You insult me," said Lang.

"No insult intended. You're a newspaperman yourself, aren't you?"

"Among other things, I like to think."

"Your one-time boss who never told you what to write has slandered the guys so much they're kind of sensitive on that score.

Moscow minions. Scum of the earth. International Communist gangsters. . ."

"That's a lot of crap," said Lang. "Nobody with a brain believes it."

"I'm afraid too many people do," said Blau, "including your friend Roosevelt."

"No," said Lang with heat. "That's not true. He knows the score here. Your diarrhetic friend was right, though. My old church *is* too powerful, and a politician has to think of votes. He made the crucial decision back in October '36. The hierarchy talked turkey. They say Jim Farley was the mouthpiece."

"When did *you* leave the Church?"

"Long ago," said Lang. "In my early twenties."

There was a sound of planes and Lang looked at the sky. Three rapid rifle-shots sounded up near the road, which was apparently a signal, for there were immediate voices up and down the *barranca* shouting, *"Aviónes! Abajo!"* and running feet were heard.

These were Capronis and they weren't too high, Lang noticed. He looked at Blau to see what he was feeling, but Ben was looking at his feet. "That's quite an organization, the Church. And once it gets a grip on you. . ."

"Something like Communism," said Lang, aware that he was trembling. "A faith's a faith."

"I wouldn't know," said Blau. "I've read a lot of their stuff, and they say their faith is based on a study of history."

Lang couldn't help half-crouching under the sage-brush on the bank behind him, but Ben said, "They're after Mora la Nueva." He looked at Lang and said, "It's safer here than the Hotel Majestic."

"Aren't you afraid, Ben?" said Lang, meaning the fear of action more than the fear of bombs. He was ashamed of his own fear, but at the same time he was enjoying the fact that there was something he could share with this ugly man squatting in front of him.

"Sure," said Ben. "Who isn't?"

"Are you married?" (Blau laughed.) "What's so funny?" Lang insisted. "Lot's of people get married, they say."

"Do I look like the answer to the Maiden's Prayer?" said Ben, and when Lang said, "What's wrong with you?" Ben said, "I have a face that would stop an eight-day clock."

"You can't have been around very much, Ben," said Lang. "I've known lots of women, and if you rule out young girls, women don't care particularly whether a man looks like what used to be called an Arrow Collar ad in my time."

"Now that I've broken the rules," said Ben, "my bank-account will be as flat as my face."

"The *Globe* played you on the front page," said Lang. "Did you know?" Ben shook his head. "But I think you under-rate the sex."

"To the contrary," said Ben, suddenly serious. "I probably over-rate it. I look for things in women that don't exist in most human beings; I expect too much of them. I recognize now that it's a disease of our class."

"Our class?"

"My folks were well off. I'm the family freak. Rebelled against the success formula that drove my father to suicide at forty-five. Lost his shirt in '29."

Lang put out his hand. *"Mon semblable, mon frère,"* he said, and added, "That's Baudelaire, a star-crossed fellow if ever there was one. But I'm really your opposite, born and bred in the woiking class. Hated it from the word go—poverty, I mean. Decided to get out of it, and I never intend to go back, except over my dead body."

"Who likes poverty?" said Ben. "That's what this war is all about, isn't it?" He looked at Lang and said slowly, "You don't look too happy with your success."

"What's happy, Doctor Freud?" said Zav, delighted that he could play back the crack Ben had used on him in Barcelona three weeks earlier.

"Happy is enough to eat, a job you like to do and do well, somebody to love who loves you back, security when you're all played out."

"That's not happy," said Lang. "That's Utopia."

"No," said Ben, "it would be socialism, I suppose."

"Es igual. Three weeks in the Brigade and you begin to sound just like Dolores Muñoz."

Ben laughed. "We get the same daily cable from Moscow. Tells us what to say, think and do. It comes with the gold ration."

They both laughed and Lang decided that if he was in awe of Captain Busch, he was half in love with Ben Blau. He was embarrassed by what he was feeling and said, "Dolores likes you, too."

"As much as you like *her?"*...

...By the time Zav reached Reus in the Matford it was dark and he had to switch on his lights. The moment he entered the town, however, a soldier at a checkpoint made him turn them off, and it took him a good three quarters of an hour to thread his way through the battered town. (The marquee of a smashed *ciné* still carried the words: *Tiempos Modernos, con Carlos Chaplin.*)

The town had been bombed again. The streets he would normally have taken were clogged with rubble and he had to ask his way several times, showing his *salvoconducto* at every stop.

Approaching Barcelona from the southwest along the coast road, he had a distinct feeling of relief—as from danger escaped—once he passed the heights of Montjuich on his left. It was a landmark, bulky and sinister, with the full moon just rising.

It did not take too long to get into the city (*Barcelona is what Paris would like to be*), where he was ordered to turn off his lights again, and he turned north past the Estación Francia.

Here the problem of driving at night without lights became nerve-racking torture. The inevitable *camiones* and military staff-cars that were practically the only traffic permitted to roll around at night (or even in the daytime) drove madly through the streets, honking their horns. Some had headlights painted blue or black with clear narrow strips, and he was convinced that he was going to get smacked before he reached the Paseo de Gracia and turned for the short drive to the Majestic.

The man at the desk gave him a few letters, a telephone message and said, *"Si, hay,"* when Lang asked, *"Hay agua caliente ahora?"*

In his room, where the windowpanes were latticed with long ribbons of paper, he sighed deeply and was delighted that there was hot water. He mixed a brandy and water without ice and downed it rapidly. The telephone message was from Dolores, who had apparently called to find out if he was back from the front, and this evidence of her solicitude gratified him.

He called her and was happy to find that she could dine with him within an hour, and as he climbed into the bathtub and saw the sand wash off his body into the water, he reached to the stool he had placed beside the tub and took the pad and pencil.

REQUEST DIVORCE, he printed, LETTER FOLLOWS. ZAV.

He looked at what he had written and decided that it was too unexpected, too blunt, too cruel. But how the hell could he write it, and what message carrying such a request would be any the less abrupt or cruel?

He felt that he must advise Anne of his decision as rapidly as possible, for her letters conveyed her loneliness and fear, and it was neither fair nor decent to allow her to believe that everything was the same between them as when he had left her in New York.

For that matter, what *had* it been like when he left? Nothing so hot, he remembered. Quarrels and recriminations over the casual affairs he simply could not seem to avoid. Permanent and underlying tension that burst into the open at the slightest pretext or

at no pretext at all. And this after only three years of marriage.

It had been a mistake from the word go and they were fools to... He tried again, printing carefully. MRS. ANNE LANG, 48 BANK STREET, NEW YORK, EEUU. THIS WAR REDUCES ONE TO ESSENTIALS. MUCH TIME TO CONTEMPLATE OUR MARRIAGE. IS IT A MARRIAGE AFTER ALL? — Ridiculous! he thought. The only way to do it was by letter, and a letter it would have to be.

He could compose a wingding of a letter and have scope in which to explain everything that had happened to him since he came to Spain; why something in him, even from the beginning, had resisted Anne's suggestions by mail and cable that she come over and join him; how his premonitions of finality, so far as the marriage was concerned, had been borne out by the profound love he now knew he felt for Dolores. How this was no casual affair; he had never so much as laid a finger on her but his entire body and his very soul needed this small Spanish woman as they never had needed any human being he had met in all his life.

Let it ride, Lang thought, his heart beating rapidly as he suddenly remembered that time had passed and Dolores would be calling from the lobby at any moment. She was the soul of promptness, and she was also the soul of rectitude, that Spanish rectitude he could neither match nor cope with at moments, and which he found extraordinary in a woman who said she was a Communist and who should, therefore, be free of "bourgeois" prejudices.

For no matter how he tried to lure her to his room for a drink before dinner or for *canapés* that could not be found even in the black-market restaurants (which she refused to patronize), she had steadfastly refused to come up to his room, even when Lang had company, like Elliman, Herbert Matthews of the *New York Times* or any of the others.

She said she trusted him. She implied (without saying it) that she knew he would not attempt to make love to her, but she was not tempted by Black & White, Courvoisier or even the Dry Sack he had paid a fortune for on the *estraperlo* and told her Georges Soria of *l'Humanité* had brought to him from his last trip over the border.

As a matter of fact, she did not approve of the correspondents bringing such delicacies into Spain even for their own consumption.

"How can you people eat like that," she had asked indignantly, "when so many of our people are starving?"

"Querida," he had replied, "you don't feed the hungry by insisting on starving yourself. Come up to the room. A colleague in Lyon sent me a beautiful *paté de campagne."*

"I have read," said Dolores, "that in your country the young men seduce young women to come to their rooms by offering to show, what is the word—*grabados al agua fuerte?*"

"Etchings?" said Lang, laughing.

"Etchings," she said. "And you offer cheddar cheese, spiced ham, butter and blood sausage."

"Perdóname," he replied. "I have no etchings and you have no love."

"I love all who love Spain," Dolores said, her face so serious that he impulsively embraced her on the spot, which happened to be in the middle of the Plaza de Cataluña.

Now, after she had called from below, he refused to wait for the ancient elevator and raced down the four flights of stairs to the lobby to greet her.

Like all the women of Republican Spain these days, she was not wearing a hat, but unlike many he saw on the streets she had not bleached her magnificent black hair and he never ceased to be grateful to her. "Thine head upon thee is like Carmel," he said aloud as he crossed to grasp her by both hands, "and the hair of thine head like purple..."

He told her what he had seen as they walked into the *fonda* with its glass dome that always reminded him of the Garden Court in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco, and were shown to a table by a waiter in meticulous tuxedo. He told her of his meeting with Blau and was a trifle piqued by her considerable interest in him.

"There was a bombing," said Dolores. "A fish market in Barcelonetta, at ten this morning."

"Why bother?" said Lang, "the fish were dead to begin with," but she shook her head and said, "Thirty were killed, a hundred and twenty-four wounded, mostly women waiting in line to buy *bacalao.*"

"Forgive me," he said and took her hand across the table. She permitted the gesture for a moment then gently withdrew her hand. "I'm sorry, *chica,*" he said. "I was in a bombing myself today, near Mora la Nueva. It was a thoughtless thing to say."

"I forgive you," she said, "but I will not forgive the *asesinos.*"

"Nor will I forgive them," Lang said passionately. "But do not forget, cruel as it is, every time they do this they provide ammunition for our side. The decent people of the world will not tolerate this much longer."

"How long will they tolerate?" she said. "The enemy is nearer the Mediterranean. Soon there be no communication between north and south. This will be impossible."

"Now *you* are talking like a defeatist," he said gently, knowing

she was only reflecting what he himself had felt for many months, in fact, from the very beginning. He had no faith that the Republic could win this war and never had. "This is what you generally accuse *me* of doing."

"It is not your war," she said with some bitterness. "You will not have to live under fascism if we lose. That is not life. It is death."

"You will not lose," he said. "*We* will not lose."

"If we do, there will be world war," she said. "And the bombs will fall on Paris and London and perhaps even New York."

"We will not lose," said Lang. "I promise you."

At that she laughed and the unbearable weight Lang had felt on his back and shoulders suddenly lifted. They ate the meal, a soup, herring (a small piece), a fresh peach and wine, all tastefully prepared but barely enough to whet the appetite.

Lang paid the fifty *pesetas* and was about to leave a tip when Dolores frowned and he remembered. Since the war had started the waiters had refused to accept tips.

"Come and see my etchings, *querida,*" he said. "I even have some bananas in the clothes closet, not to mention an excellent *paté de foie gras* in a stone crock and American coffee with real sugar. No *sacarina.*"

She shook her head and smiled. "You'll never learn," she said, and started to get up from the table when the lights suddenly went out. Simultaneously, the sirens were heard rising and falling and they both looked up at the glass dome over their heads, saw the searchlights crossing through the thousands of small leaded panes.

Lang groped frantically in the dark, said, "Dolores, where are you?" and she said, "Here am I," in a small voice, and his hand found her, grasped her arm.

They sat side by side in the dark, aware of the other people in the large dining room, all of whom were looking at the glass over their heads and breathing quietly. There was no outcry. Not a voice could be heard.

The sirens moaned and the searchlight beams crossed each other, and then they heard the high scream of the falling bombs (must be down near the port, Lang thought, trembling and wondering if Dolores could feel his fear through the hand that was gripping her arm.)

He listened carefully to hear if anyone were leaving the dining room, but it was dead silent. No one spoke. Not even their breathing could be heard though there were over a hundred people around them.

"Tengo miedo," Dolores said, and he heard her sobbing quietly.

The bombs burst with a dull roar (down near the Barrio Chino, Lang figured) and the hotel trembled gently. The sirens continued their Moorish wail over the louder sound of the engines in the sky. The engines throbbed rather than howled up and down on an oscillating note that for some reason or other was even more terrifying than the scream of the bombs or the muffled explosions in the distance.

Then it was suddenly quiet as the planes, which had come in from the sea, banked sharply over the city and swept south again toward Majorca. They knew there would be another wave of them in a few minutes and the silence in the dining room, Lang felt, was absolutely insupportable. It would have been much easier to bear if someone had screamed or fainted or called for help or at least cried aloud in anger or in fear.

Then out of the dead silence of the breathing room, a single voice arose, a woman's voice, singing *flamenco,* and Lang realized with astonishment, after a moment or so, that it was Dolores who was singing. Her small body quivered and he could feel the muscles of her arm vibrating as the song poured from her or rather seemed to emanate from her entire body.

Like the true *canto hondo,* it was a total improvisation and Lang could not understand Dolores singing it, for there was not a drop of Gypsy or Andalucian in her makeup. She was pure *Madrileña.* He listened carefully, and he got most of the words.

It was a song of fear and determination. It sprang, apparently, from the words she had first spoken: *"Tengo miedo,"* and she began the song with those words:

"I am afraid...
"Afraid to die...
"Afraid of the criminals on wings,
"Murderers of children, of women,
"Killers of life, of love,
"Assassins of my country...
"But more than I am afraid,
"I am angry... my anger burns...
"My fear burns up in my anger...
"My anger will grow, it is a soldier's anger...
"It is in my arms, in my rifle...
"I will restore to life, restore to love
"Those who are dead, those who are dying,
"The women in line to buy fish,
"The women in line to buy milk...
"They will live again...

"They will break the black wings,
"They will breathe life
"Into the mouths of the dead children
"Lying in rows on the streets of my city...
"This I swear to you... to all of you
"Sleeping in your beds tonight...."

8

Ben was in the city room of the *Daily Worker* when the UP machine started to hammer. WASHINGTON, NOV. 24, 1947 (BULLETIN)—THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES THIS AFTERNOON VOTED TO CITE FOR CONTEMPT OF CONGRESS 10 HOLLYWOOD WRITERS, DIRECTORS AND PRODUCERS WHO LAST MONTH REFUSED TO TEX TELL THE COMMITTEE ON UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY.

"Hi, Dave," Ben shouted across the room, "take a look at this." Dave, who was in the slot, came over, and the two men stood watching as the impersonal device continued to bang out the news.

THE ACTION COULD RESULT IN THEIR CASE BEING TURNED OVER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FOR PROSECUTION. CONTEMPT OF CONGRESS IS A MISDEMEANOR, PUNISHABLE BY PRISON TERMS OF ONE MONTH TO ONE YEAR AND FINES UP TO ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS ON EACH COUNT.

SIMULTANEOUSLY THE COMMITTEE ANNOUNCED THAT IT WOULD OPEN PUBLIC SESXXX HEARINGS IN NEW YORK CITY EARLY NEXT MONTH. IT HAS BEEN HOLDING EXECUTIVE SESSIONS IN THAT CITY.

THE NAMES OF THE HOLLYWOOD WITNESSES, WHO ARE CALLED QUOTE THE UNFRIENDLY TEN UNQUOTE XXXX AND WERE CITED BY CONGRESS THIS AFTERNOON ARE...

The two men looked at each other. "Do a piece on this, will you, Ben?" said Dave, and Ben nodded. For the moment he was less interested in these people than he was in the speculative question of who would be called to the public sessions next month.

When the story was all in, he tore it off the machine and walked back to his desk. For the past week the paper had been able to put him on full time and he was enjoying himself.

He called to Joyce, who handled the morgue, and asked for the clips on the Unfriendly Ten, as well as anything she could dig up about the pictures they had written, directed of produced, the novels, stories, background material.

"Knock out an editorial, too, will you?" Dave said, and Ben said, "OK."

Now, as he worked out the story of the citation, he remembered the time he had run into trouble on the *Globe*, when he was covering the 1936 seamen's strike. It had been a rank and file affair that eventually saw the birth of the NMU, with the old ISU brass dragging its heels all the way.

The stories he'd turned in after visiting strike headquarters on West Street in Manhattan, interviewing Joe Curran and Jack Lawrenson, Blackie Myers and Ferdinand Smith, talking to the ranks on the picket lines and the guys in the soup kitchen in Brooklyn, had answered to the newspaperman's who-what-where-when prescription for the lead, but he couldn't seem to keep the why from dominating the story.

And since the *Globe's* editorial page was thundering about the strike almost every day of the week, the managing editor didn't take long to spot the discrepancy between what the boss was saying and what the legman named Blau was turning in at the city desk.

"What the hell is this, Ben?" he had asked, and Ben had played dumb, instinctively. He knew what the question meant. He figured he would play it by ear, play it light.

"The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, boss," he said, "without fear or favor." He flashed his brilliant grin.

"Don't give me this crap, Blau," the M. E. had said. "You know we don't editorialize in our news columns." Not much you don't, Ben thought, but ignored the crack. However, he couldn't resist saying, "I used to ship out myself. I've written nothing but the facts."

"So what?" said the editor. "You can write yourself out of a job, you know."

"Men who get paid forty-seven fifty a month have a legitimate beef," said Ben, "even if you don't count the lousy quarters—and I mean lousy—the garbage served for grub and. . ."

"Skip it," the editor said, but when Ben looked at the day book the next morning he discovered he was off the story, and the city editor told him the paper had hired Francis X. Lang to do a series of feature and color stories on the strike.

"Trained seal, eh?" said Ben. Well, he'd give the paper its money's worth, all right. (Boy, that eating out was nothing to the letter Ferguson wrote him after he quit the job in Spain. *That* one should have been written on asbestos. Why didn't I ever answer it?)

Now the phone rang and Dave called, "Ben... phone," and as he walked across to take the call, Dave winked.

"*Are* you there?" Ben said, knowing very well who it was.

"I'm here," said Sue Menken. "Are *you* there? You sound low."

Suddenly Ben was even more dejected and his voice dropped, though he didn't intend it to. "A piece of him," he said, and suddenly recalled that Joe Faber used that quote on Elliman.

"Are you free for dinner?"

"Dinner's never free. Who's paying?"

"You're working full time, aren't you?" she said. "Or have you changed your name to Scrooge?"

"Blau's the name—means Blue. We'll go Dutch."

"Goody, goody gumdrop," Sue said. "I'll drop by your room if it's OK by you."

"OK," he said.

"You sound positively thrilled to death," she said.

"I'm busy." He made a sudden decision and let it sound in his voice. "But I *want* to see you."

After the paper had gone to bed, Ben went home. It was only four o'clock. He walked slowly up the stairs, passing Mrs. Hornstein on the way down. She had to stand sideways to let him pass, though she was not much narrower from the flank than she was in full facade. She said something to him that he did not hear; then when he had passed she looked back at him and muttered, *"Meshugenah."*

When he got into the room Ben put Albeñiz' *Iberia* on the radiophonograph and pushed the button. It was the only expensive article in the furnished room and had cost him two hundred dollars exclusive of interest, which he had been amortizing at the rate of $10.25 a month for the past year. His record collection, gathered since the war ended, had been similarly acquired—at the expense of his stomach and his wardrobe.

Now, as the opening movement of the suite unfolded with its evocation of Andalucia and Navarra and the characteristic *jota,* Ben tried to think about Sue. He recalled a statement his high school psychology teacher had made years before: "Not one person out of ten can think *logically* for more than twenty seconds at a time." He wondered idly if it was true.

He thought petulantly that the whole business with Sue was all Francis X. Lang's fault anyhow. (Amazing how that guy keeps turning up in my life!) If she hadn't turned up at Lang's apartment on University Place that night a year ago, the affair never would have started. Some aspiring scribbler who knew the celebrated author had brought her along, but he could scarcely blame it on Lang after all. It was your own fault, he thought.

She had sat across the room from him almost all that evening, and he noticed immediately that she was an attractive girl and put her out of mind. She seemed to pay no particular attention to him. He tried not to think too much about girls, for he had been slapped down too often in the past and he didn't relish repeat performances. Besides, she was probably attached to the guy who brought her and who was nodding his head like a bird in a coocoo clock every time Lang said something or the great columnist Wilhelmina Patton thought she had scored off Blau.

Then during a moment of confusion or argumentation or something, when Patton was holding forth, fingering her pearl necklace like a Grand Duchess in a British movie, or maybe there was a glass spilled (he couldn't recall), the girl changed seats and settled on the big sofa beside him.

She smiled at him as she pulled out a cigarette and he lit it for her, and he heard himself saying, "I don't suppose I could take you home."

"Not tonight," she said.

Ben was so completely flattered by her ready acceptance of further acquaintance that he never had time to think the thing out. He needed a girl and here was a lovely girl who liked him on sight. She was gay, intelligent and warm. She shared his opinion of Zav and practically all his other ideas about the world. Within the week they had come together with passion and with an astonishing lack of self-consciousness. That was a year ago, he thought now, but in a year's time a man can do a lot of thinking. (And you have *never* got over Ellen, have you, Blau?)

Sue knocked on the door, opened it and came in. She was wearing a neat tailored suit with a long coat over it, which she took off and threw on the studio couch next to the wall.

"Nice of you to ask me to dinner," she said, deliberately batting her eyes, which had the longest lashes he had ever seen.

"Who're you kidding?" he laughed. "You invited yourself." He pushed the button and the phonograph turned itself off.

"What'd you do that for?" she said.

"Can't hear myself think."

Then she answered his question. "I always *do,* don't I?" She might have been reading his mind all the way from Union Square, where she worked in the outsize dress department of I. Klein.

"Are you hungry?"

She looked at him archly and said, "Exectly how do you mean that?" He knew what she meant and said, "Well, I'm *not.*"

"Oh?" she said. "And you haven't seen me in two whole weeks!

Who's the girl friend? Joyce, that corpse in the *Daily Worker* morgue?"

"Joyce is a very nice girl," he said stuffily. "Maybe you'd like a game of chess?"

"What a quaint idea!"

"What's quaint about it?" he said. "It gives me an appetite—for food."

"Not me," she said. "You're always catching me with the Fool's Mate. I never see it coming."

"That's what you *are,* Sue. A fool's mate. And that's what I want to talk about." He sat down.

"Oh, no," she said histrionically. "Not that. *Anything* but that!"

The room was small enough so that Ben sitting in the armchair could reach forward without effort and take her hands as she sat on the day bed. "I'm serious," he said.

"This is news, Mr. Blue?"

"When we met I'd spent four years in the army and six months in the hospital. I was hungry, too."

"Good," she said.

"No good. Look," he said, squeezing her hands. "We've got to call it a day. It's wrong. I like you. I respect you. But I don't feel the way you do about this thing. I'm sorry, but I can't help it, Sue."

"Who's complaining?" she said. She was sitting on the bed, her hands folded in her lap like a small girl being scolded. There were tears in her eyes.

"Can't you be serious?" he said.

"More than you'd like." He started to speak but she shut him off. "Look, Ben. I knew when I met you at Lang's that I wanted you. I've wanted you every day since and..."

"Sue."

"I *love* you, you damned fool," she said.

OK, he said to himself. Here goes. "I don't love you, Sue. I have no intention of marrying you. This isn't fair to you and you shouldn't be tangled up with a bird like me."

"Do you think I don't know?"

"So..."

"So I'm satisfied. Maybe you'll get around to loving me in time. It happens. If not, that's too bad."

"I don't get it."

"Why not? You're a bright fellow. You like to sleep with me, don't you?"

"Of course."

"If I could mean more to you than that, you'd welcome it?"

"Yes."

"I'm the same. But if you can't give more, you can't." She looked at him, her eyes brimming with tears. She didn't want to say what was in her mind, but she said it anyhow. "Why can't you?"

"I don't know," he said, got out of the chair and walked to the window and looked into the street. He was aware that she was right behind him and was about to touch him. He wished she wouldn't.

She put her arms around him and said, "Is it Ellen?"

He didn't answer. He didn't want to think about Ellen Gross, whom he had married after he came back from Spain. He didn't want to think about that business at all. It was too painful even now, eight years later. Whatever became of her? he wondered. (Stop it.) Spain and Ellen and impossible; Germany and Sue and impossible. But for different reasons. *Stop* it.

He turned around and said, "Where would you like to eat?"

"Es igual," she said and smiled. "I learned that from you, remember?"

"I remember."

As he got into his trench coat and hat he thought, what a crazy business. You've been looking for love all your life and here is a fine girl anxious to give it to you and you can't accept it. What the hell is the matter with you anyhow? He recalled that conversation with Zav in Spain, when he had said, "I look for things in women that don't exist in most human beings; I expect too much of them. It's a disease of our class." Was that true, or was it that you're essentially a cold fish? Spain and Ellen. Germany and Sue. Impossible for opposite reasons. (My *former* class, he thought.)

As though she had been reading his mind again, Sue suddenly said, "One thing you've got to promise me, Ben," and he turned to look at her. "Don't give me this high-level morality stuff, will you? Don't even believe it yourself."

"What morality stuff?"

"That I love you and you don't love me and we've got to break it up because you're making use of me. That's a form of male superiority in reverse."

He didn't answer because he realized she had hit it right on the nose again. "Where will it be? Stewart's Cafeteria?" he said, "the Chinese restaurant or the Spanish place down the block?"

"It's equal," she said again. She made what was obviously an effort to be bright and cheerful and said, "Did you listen to Lang the last couple Sundays?"

"Sometimes I forget."

"After he appeared before the committee I figured he'd blast it. He didn't. Didn't even mention it; went into a long *megila* about

the Marshall Plan and what have you. As phony an analysis as any laxative manufacturer could want."

"He's been in the woodwork a long time."

"Do you think he's a friendly witness?"

"I doubt it," Ben said as they came out on the street. "He could have done that a long time ago."

"Why not?"

"Basically, he's a decent guy," Ben said. "Been drinking ever since Spain, they say. You saw him that night. Did I ever tell you about the conversation I had with his wife after you and that character who brought you left?"

"Jealous?" she said, and to his astonishment Ben discovered that he was, in a way, but all he did was laugh.

"I told you the week we went that that character's my kid cousin," Sue said, then added, "No, you didn't."

"I'll tell you at dinner."

"Then maybe after dinner, you'll be hungry?" she said, looking up at him out of the corners of her eyes and making like Rita Hayworth.

"Posible," he said with a smile. "You missed your vocation, Sue. Should have been a comic."

"I *am* a comic," she said. "Why don't you laugh?"

9

May 23, 1938

"While so frankly admitting to you the seriousness of our situation, we are not giving way to exaggerated alarm. We are just telling you the naked truth, drastic though it may be. We have always told the truth, and we are telling it now, for we want everyone to realize it as we do and to face the danger with complete calm, and also if the danger should become more acute, that nobody may lose hope in victory and give way to despair..."

Lang was listening to what the speaker—standing only a few feet from him—was saying. He looked out into the auditorium from the stage of the theater in Madrid on which he was sitting next to Dolores, surrounded by representatives of half a dozen European Communist newspapers.

There he sat, the only non-Communist in a theater full of them (if you except, as always, the planted spies and intelligence agents)

at a plenary session of the central committee of the Spanish Communist Party!

He remained somewhat amazed that nobody was staring at him or had even looked displeased when he came in with Dolores. He felt that she had taken a terrible chance to bring him there, and he had at first refused to come. But she had practically insisted, saying with a smile that he would be in no danger. She had even used a typical Americanism—"Nobody will bite you!"

"Not I—*you,*" he had replied in Barcelona two days before. And at that she had laughed outright, saying, "You still feel that we are a *junta* of conspirators, don't you?"

"...the principal instruments of this plan were the foreign forces which have seized our territory. This was perfectly well known all over Europe, and especially in London and Paris. What is more, the preparations for the offensive against our country were made not only with the knowledge, but even with the consent of the British government.... The British-Italian agreement was discussed and drawn up at the very time preparations were being made for the Aragón offensive. It was signed on April 16, when the invaders had already reached Alcañiz and Caspe..."

"But Dolores is going to speak," she had said in the little sidewalk café on the Rambla de los Flores, and for a moment he was touched, thinking she was referring to herself in the third person, as small children often do.

When she explained that it was not she who was going to deliver a major political report, which he as a representative of powerful American wire services would be interested in hearing first-hand, he had said, "Oh, the *other* Dolores."

"There is only one Dolores, Francisco," she said, and he took the Spanish version of his name as a concrete mark of endearment, for it was the first time she had ever used it.

This was one of the reasons he had finally consented to come to Madrid with her that night, and they had flown in a Douglas transport under charter to the army. But all the way there and all that night and the next day at the Hotel Florida and the next night till they had met that very morning for breakfast, Lang had not been convinced that he should attend or that Dolores *la pequeña* (he was beginning now to think of her in those terms) could actually get him into the meeting.

She had done more than that. She had introduced him openly to several comrades who seemed to know his name, men and women whose names *he* knew and whose faces he had seen in *Frente Rojo* and even in the publications of other parties that comprised the *Frente Popular.*

"...the enemy has been carrying on the offensive on another front too—within our own country. I refer not only to the subversive activities of the 'fifth column,' to the spies who have wormed their way into high posts in our army, to the Trotskyite officers of the P.O.U.M. who managed to penetrate into certain units... I refer chiefly to the defeatist campaigns, overt and covert, which preceded and accompanied the enemy's offensive. These campaigns originated abroad, but found a response among certain strata in our country—"

Lang looked at the "other" Dolores, to whom *le pequeña* had introduced him when she came on stage, the huge bouquet of red roses cradled in her arms. The dark woman had taken his hand in a firm grip, and she had laughed aloud at something the little one had said, and which Lang in his confusion hadn't caught, and she had even glanced at him with something he interpreted as approval.

But it was when she began to speak that Lang finally knew what she was and why she had emerged from the masses of her people, daughter of an Asturian miner and a miner's wife, herself, to the post of elected deputy to the *Cortes.*

She was one of those singular human beings who seem to summarize, in her own person, the people of her entire nation. She was one with them in size, in stance, in expression, in tongue and movement. As she spoke she used her hands and arms in economical but forceful gestures. She spoke in a voice that ranged from low contralto to soprano, but at all times possessed the vibrant quality of a powerful stringed instrument and at all times carried implicit conviction.

"'...the slogan, 'Resist!'" she was saying, *"which was launched in the days when the enemy was advancing was taken up by all our fighters and the whole people. Our army put up a heroic resistance. Our people too resisted those who predicted or proposed capitulation. That is why, in spite of the big successes he has achieved, the enemy has been unable to carry out his plans in their entirety—"*

If I were reading this speech in a newspaper, Lang thought, sitting comfortably in Bank Street in New York or at the house in Bucks County, I would say it was a typical propaganda piece, conceived and delivered to rally people. But being there and having eyes in his head, a pair of ears and what passes for a mind, he knew that there was not a word this woman was saying that was not the literal truth.

"...Our resistance has not only given the world fresh proof of the virility, fighting power, organization, heroism and self-confidence of the Spanish people, but has also given rise to a new international situation, the chief feature of which is that the organiza-

tion of a front of counteraction to the fascist plans of conquest has begun..."

The dark woman at the podium was capable of stirring vast audiences to a high pitch of emotion, Lang knew, but it was not the sort of emotion he had witnessed in Munich or Berlin at the *Sports-Palast* when *Der Schöne Adolf* spoke. For what Hitler said, if you listened carefully, made little enough sense, but the logic of this woman's mind was inexorable.

It puzzled him that he could have formed such an equation in his own mind. It might have been natural even a year ago, had he counterposed a hypothetical Communist and a hypothetical Nazi and compared the effects they created on their listeners. Here the equation should have died at birth and never crossed the threshold of his consciousness.

After all, he knew very well by association with them both that there *was* no equation between the two political groups he—and so many others—chose to call "totalitarian." If he didn't know it before Spain, he had realized it from the moment he met Dolores (the little), Constancia de la Mora, or such military leaders as Antonio Cordón or Modesto.

He was no Elliman who could say, "I have no politics," and said it proudly on every occasion. "I tried to read that stuff," said Elliman, "Marx and Lenin and the rest. It made my head hurt. I *have* no politics, but I know right from wrong and true from false."

"How?" Zav had challenged him. "By osmosis?"

"Why not?" said Clem and passed the bottle of Jameson. "Absorb!"

"...Today, as in those times, people with a clear conception of human freedom and human progress are on our side; and democratic France, which is directly menaced by fascist aggression, is coming to see more clearly every day that her fate is bound up with ours, and she is therefore tending to adopt a more energetic policy toward fascism..."

(Is she talking of the French government or the French people? Lang wondered. The government stinks. The French people had lost thousands of their best sons at University City in this very capital of the Republic.)

Seated at the press table next to Dolores, Lang timidly grasped her hand under cover of the drapery that covered it. She pressed it once and then released it, gently, he felt. He was encouraged.

He looked out over the rapt audience; the silence in the pauses was thunderous; the people were strained to a peak of attention he had never believed possible. From the balconies hung long red streamers with white letters on them: RESISTIR ES VENCER! said one. Another read: VIVA LA UNION SOVIÉTICA: MEJOR

AMIGO DEL PUEBLO ESPAÑOL. Others urged people to "Support the Government of National Union," said, "The Thirteen Points are the Road to Victory" and "Don't Waste Food, the Children Need It" and 1938: AÑO DE LA VICTORIA!

"...Our Party has made whatever sacrifices were required of it to facilitate the reorganization of the government... This constitutes a categorical reply to those who, because of the participation of the Communists in the government, have spread the absurd story abroad that our country is headed toward a dictatorship of the proletariat; and who have spread discord and dissension within the country by pretending that the Communists are the masters of the government and the state..."

It was certainly not the type of speech he had expected to hear, nor was the atmosphere the sort he had expected to find. What *did* I expect? he asked himself, the hysterical, whooping melodrama of a Nazi rally? The insanity and the hatred whipped up by careful stage-management?

But this was the central committee of the Spanish party itself, and while Dolores had paid tribute to "our great Stalin," what she was saying and the "line" she was elaborating bore no resemblance to anything he could recognize as having come from Moscow.

"...We have opposed unjust expropriation and compulsory collectivization, but we have also fought to have the lands of the aristocrats, of the caciques and of all who have taken part in the revolt turned over to the poor peasants and agricultural workers so that they may cultivate them as they think fit and, with the help of the state, increase their productivity..."

She analyzed the program of what she called the democratic revolution in Spain and said, "The most revolutionary thing now is to win the war, which in the international sphere means winning the first victory over fascism. If we lose the war, we shall not only lose the possibility of establishing a more progressive system in the future, but we shall also lose all hope of our people living in freedom for a long time to come."

She spoke of what *could* happen if the war were won; of how Spain could finally—in the twentieth century—emerge from the feudalism shucked off by most of the nations of the world a century or more before. She spoke of "educational institutions and universities whose doors will be thrown wide open to the people ...our women will be liberated from domestic slavery and seclusion and will become free citizens..." and Lang knew that these things were already happening in Spain, that women occupied a new role in society, that more schools had been built since 1931, when the Republic was established, than had been built in centuries before.

He looked at Dolores beside him, who had told him that the mere establishment of the Republic, seven years earlier, had wrought a revolution in her own life. She had emerged from a convent school, left the Church behind her forever and had actually taken a job in the city, and nobody had considered it demeaning or vulgar or unfeminine, except her conservative parents. She lived alone in an apartment and went about unescorted and nobody considered her impure. Now she was a functionary in her government itself, and her opinions were respected by the men who worked with her and her work was valued as a contribution to the crucial struggle in which they were all engaged.

"...Across the barriers of hatred and blood which treason has erected between the two Spains," the "other" Dolores was saying, "between the Spain which looks toward the future and maintains the glorious traditions of our history, and the Spain which looks toward the past in the hope of reviving all that is antiquated and decayed, we turn to those who are proud to be Spaniards and say:

"Only the Spaniards are able and entitled to settle their internal disputes. And therefore the highest interest of all is a war to the death against the invaders!"

This statement was greeted with applause such as Lang had never heard in his life and a standing ovation that lasted for minutes while the strong, dark woman stood there, threw back her head, laughed loudly and shook her right arm and hand at the people below. And Lang knew that what she had just said found echoes even in the fascist camp, where dissaffection with the role played by the Italian blackshirts had broken into the open on more than one occasion recently.

When the applause died, the radiant smile Dolores had displayed vanished, and she continued. "I repeat, the situation is extremely grave. The independence of Spain is seriously menaced. But Spain has sufficient resources not only to halt the advance of the invaders but to repulse them and utterly rout them."

Lang wondered how deeply she believed this statement, or whether it was not rather both wishful thinking and morale-boosting. For the first time since he had been in Spain he began to realize the complexity of the problems involved, that there was a great deal more to this war than a mere rebellion of disaffected military men; more than an invasion by Italy and Germany; more than a laboratory for Nazi weapons (such as Guernica had been). He realized that the lines crossed and criss-crossed—the lines of influence, of stress and strain and intrigue were both national and international.

It was normal, he felt, for Communists to holler "Plot!" but he was beginning to see that their analysis of the situation was not

only more dispassionate than he had believed possible, but as nearly accurate as any could possibly be, given the complexity of the situation and the elements that never appeared upon the surface.

". . . The enemy controls some very rich districts of Spain, particularly the Basque country, the Asturias (Lang knew the British had interests in both) *and a part of Andalusia. But the difference between the enemy and us is that in the zones dominated by the forces of intervention they are encountering tremendous difficulties in their attempts to mobilize the population to work for them. It is not an easy matter to make a people return to slave labor once they have known freedom."*

(Lang believed that this was probably true but decided on the moment to visit the fascist side and poke around himself. He had read what Jay Allen, Larry Fernsworth and the others had written, as well as French and British correspondents, and he knew Fernsworth to be a man of integrity and a practicing Catholic. He had read and been deeply moved by the declarations of the Basque clergy, as well, who could scarcely be considered Red sympathizers unless you were prepared to say that anyone who opposed fascism was a Communist, which was granting the Reds far too much credit.)

Dolores continued her analysis of the situation on the Republican side and Lang realized suddenly that she had been speaking more than two hours!

"...The war has already been going on for nearly two years, and after two years of fighting and suffering, of privation and torment, it is understandable that there should be certain symptoms of fatigue, and that the people cannot be expected to display the spontaneous urge we witnessed in the early months..."

She criticized her party for doing agitational work of "too general a character," as the new forces entering the fight stood in need of explanation and the older forces were becoming weary. She criticized the Party press and said it reflected "a definite tendency of the Party to withdraw into itself from a feeling of satisfaction with its own growth and a sense of pride born of the knowledge of its own strength.

"...for there are some who forget," she said, "that the real strength of the Communist Party lies in its constant contact with the masses of non-party people and the members of other parties, which enables it to know what problems interest them and what their needs are and to cooperate with them in the solution of these problems..."

Dolores *la pequeña* looked at Lang, and he felt her glance and turned to look into her deep dark eyes. To his astonishment they

were filled with tears, and he was bewildered by this reaction and rapidly took her hand under the table and squeezed it. He felt her return the pressure and his heart raced like an automobile engine when the driver accidentally releases the clutch and steps on the accelerator at the same time.

Something told him that this speech had brought them closer than they had ever been in the months of their friendship. In fact it had brought them *together*. His mind raced over what would happen in the hours after the meeting ended, how he would tell Anne of his decision, which now seemed irrevocable, to ask for an immediate divorce.

He felt that his entire future was tied up with Dolores—the little and the "only"—and with her country which he began to feel was now his country in a way the USA had never been. How could this be? he wondered.

All through the meeting he had been aware, as had the rest of the audience, of the regular shelling of the city. Every one of them had heard the electric German batteries on Monte Garabitas, and then unconsciously held his breath waiting for the explosions. They were, as usual, hammering the working-class districts in Cuatro Caminos and sparing the abandoned or requisitioned homes of the well-to-do in the Salamanca quarter.

The night-shelling was strictly a terror operation but the *Madrileños* were used to it by now. They regularly shelled the Puerta del Sol and the Gran Via at dusk as the theaters and offices were letting out, for the effect it would have on strolling thousands.

"...Our superiority over the enemy lies precisely in the fact that we are always able to tell and explain to the people what we are fighting for and why the greatest sacrifices are necessary and essential, whereas the enemy is always bound to meet with the resistance of the people..."

. . . In the blacked-out streets Zav and Dolores walked for over two hours. The shelling had stopped and the air was keen though it was late in May. "We have a saying," said Dolores, pulling her coat around her. "You must have heard or read it: *'El aire de Madrid es tan sútil, que mata á un hombre y no apaga á un candil'.*"

"It's not the air that's likely to kill us," said Lang, "but those automatic batteries that will snuff out our candle." Then he said, "What're you laughing at? In the middle of the speech, you were crying."

"I never expected to live long enough to hear Francisco Javier Lang sing the International."

"Why not?" he cried indignantly and began to sing immediately: *"Arriba, parias de la tierra! En pie, famélica legión!"*

"Bastante," she said.

"Los proletarios gritans; Guerra!

"Guerra hasta el fin de la opresión!"

"Francisco," she said quietly.

"Why were you crying?"

She did not answer for a long time and they walked in silence through the blackout, listening for the invisible cars on the broad Calle de Alcalá.

"I had a sudden feeling of grief," she said. "Unamuno called it *'el sentimiento tragico de la vida' . . ."*

"Which side was *he* on, your great mystic philosopher?"

"You answered it," she said. "He was a mystic. *No,"* she said, "I'm not being fair. He was on Franco's side at the beginning but before he died in Salamanca he made a wonderful statement. It was in all the papers."

"I remember," said Lang. "You will conquer, but you will not convince."

"He was a great man."

"Is that why you were crying?" Lang pressed her. "Because you think they *will* conquer?"

"They need not," she said. "But they probably will."

"Dolores doesn't feel that way," said Lang.

"I am not Dolores," said Dolores. She smiled wistfully at the ironic implication of her remark and remained silent for some time as they continued walking.

"Let's go some place where we can sit down," he said.

"All right."

When they were seated in a dark corner of the bar in the Florida, where they were both staying, Lang smiled and said, "This is the greatest day of my life, *querida."*

"It is?"

"I have never heard a greater speech in my life," he said, "but speeches are a dime a dozen. I never met a greater human being than Dolores, the *other* Dolores; and I never met a lovelier woman than Dolores, *this* Dolores," he said, taking her hand.

She let her hand rest in his and with the other lifted the bad *malaga* they had ordered. It was the least she could do, to let him hold her hand. It was the least she could do, to hear him out.

"Pequeña," he said, "look at me." (She was looking at him.) "Listen to what I'm going to say, very carefully. I may not say it very well, but it is from *mi corazón."*

"I know," she said.

"I am deeply in love with you and I want to marry you and live with you—*para siempre.*"

"Yes."

"You know I'm married, but I'm not married. I have not really been married since long before I came to Spain. Tonight I'm sending a cable to my wife. I'm asking her to release me. She will. Because you are going to marry me."

"Yes," she said, but he did not know that it was merely something to say. Her eyes filled with tears and he took this for immediate acceptance. He pressed her hand in both of his.

"You make me so happy," he said. "You cannot know how—"

"My friend," she said. "I cannot marry you."

He laughed. "Give me one reason."

"I can give many, but one will be enough. I do not love you."

There was no answer to that one, Lang knew, so he ignored it and started to speak rapidly, "Anne and I married because it was something to do," he said, "and I was bored with being alone. *No,* I'm not being fair to her either. I *thought* I loved her, but believe me, darling, I didn't know what love was until I came to Spain.

"I've known so many women; I've made love to so many women. (He saw her blush.) This is a common thing when a man is looking for love and thinks he can find it if only he can find someone who is *simpatica* and that the next will be the one. This is not true."

"It is not true," she said.

"I have never touched you. You're the only woman I've ever met whom I have never laid a finger on, oh, within two days after I had met her. I'm afraid of you, Dolores."

"This is not a good basis for love, Francisco."

"I didn't make myself plain. I was afraid to touch you because what I feel is so much more than the physical desire I have had for so many women and which so many have satisfied for me without giving me anything more. But you're the first woman I've ever met that I wanted to *do* something for, not have something done for *me.* Do you understand?"

"I understand."

"What I have felt in Spain has changed me completely from what I was before I came here. I have witnessed love and experienced love everywhere I've gone. I've seen it in the amazing kindliness with which the people treat each other, the consideration and respect they show for ordinary human beings. This is something new in my experience. I never saw this, on such a scale, anywhere in America or anywhere else at any time."

"That is beautiful," she said. "I am proud of my people that they have made you feel this. It never happened here, either, Francisco, before the Republic, and never so much as since the war began."

"It has changed me into a different man," he said. "This is the first time in my life I have never felt actually worthy of a woman, and that's how I know that what I feel for you is love and not the common hunger that has plagued me all my life and driven me into so many women's arms—*por nada*. Do you believe me?"

"I believe you. You are a good man."

"Don't," said Lang. "You sound like a moving picture."

"Do I?" she said with astonishment.

"You said you don't love me. How do you know?"

She smiled sadly and said, "Because there is a man I do love."

"Where is he? You never told me."

"He is perhaps dead. He is perhaps a prisoner of the fascists."

"I am sorry."

"During the Aragón offensive," she said. "I have heard nothing since."

"Did you know when we drove down to the Ebro last month?"

"Yes," she said, and he bowed his head, remembering the ride, remembering her gay laughter and her easy handling of the two men in the car, and feeling shame for the obscene banter that had gone on between them in her presence. He looked at her. She was smiling at him. He poured a large glass of the too sweet *malaga* and drained it, then poured another. His words had dried up in his throat, and he knew there was nothing more that he could say.

"I am going up now," she said and took his hand. "I must tell you that I respect you and what you have said to me." He wanted to cry, waved his other hand and said nothing.

"You are my dear friend and I love you, too."

"No," he said. *"Basta."*

He stood as she rose from the table and she indicated that she would go upstairs alone, so he stood there watching her small figure as she left the room, then sat down again. The bottle was nearly empty and he ordered another...

In his room he found the flask of Bisquit Dubouché he had packed in the overnight bag and opened it. The room was unsteady and he sat on the edge of the bed, holding the flask in his hand.

Work, he said to himself, is the cure for all things. *Work is the opium of the people.* I must tell that to Dolores. She would enjoy that. No, she wouldn't. She doesn't have that kind of sense of humor. None of them have, he thought. Or do they? (How do *you* know?)

But I should have said, do you want me to be a Communist? I'll be a Communist. Do you want me to join the International Brigade like Blau? I'll join. Do you want me to kill Franco for you? I will kill Franco.

He knew that he would arrange the first thing he got back to Barcelona for a plane ticket to France, then visit the other side. His own correspondence, so far, had not been nearly as committed to the Republic as had Elliman's or Sheean's or Hemingway's or even Matthews'. He had tried desperately to maintain his objectivity, whatever the hell that was, reporting merely what was going on and who had said what, done what, the ebb and flow of the front. There was no question that he could get to Burgos. (*You will conquer but you will not convince.*)

He brought out the portable typewriter, opened it and set it on his lap. Onion-skin was already in the machine and he started to type. Franklin, Edward Jay Franklin III, the *chargé d'affaires,* would want a report on that speech even though *Frente Rojo* would carry it in full within a day or so. No matter. Franklin wanted color, atmosphere, his correspondent's sense of how the speech was received and any backstage gossip he could pick up. He would make a copy for Brinker, the American military *attaché,* too.

He started to laugh and drew a slug from the flask. You convinced, but you did not conquer. God knows, foreign correspondents were always called upon by their governments, wherever they might be, to "cooperate" in this way, and anyone who didn't believe foreign correspondents were all third-rate *espiónes* should be told about the birds and the bees.

But was there ever a fellow like San Francisco Javier Lang, who not only retailed (free of charge) facts, impressions, "color" and gossip to the American authorities, but also—and in a different tone of voice—to the Spanish Republican authorities as well! He started to laugh. *"A chacun son gout,"* he said aloud and started typing again.

He would confound Franklin III and Brinker, the assistant military *attaché,* by telling the plain and simple truth; that the speech was received with such an ovation it was obvious that the Spanish Communists were wholeheartedly behind the Republican government and its newly enunciated Thirteen Points, and had put their own program on ice for the duration. No conspiracy here, my friends.

And he would report to his Spanish government contact—a non-Communist—that personal conversation with Spanish Communists (unnamed) convinced him that morale was low there; that they were convinced of ultimate failure but one should be careful, they

were quite capable of pulling themselves up by their boot-straps and acting as though they were convinced of victory. 1938: AÑO DE LA VICTORIA!

The military *attaché,* Brinker, had been painfully grateful when Lang showed him the notebook Joe Faber wanted him to mail to Philadelphia. He was much interested in Faber's observations about the morale of the American volunteers after the long retreats from Belchite, through Albaléte, Hijar, Alcañiz, Caspe, Maella, Batea and Gandesa to the rout near Corbera, the splitting of the battalion and the fight to get back across the Ebro. (I must get that notebook back.)

Lang suddenly stopped typing, looked up and saw himself in the mirror that hung over the dressing table across the room. *"Salud!"* he said to his reflected image in the glass. *"Salud y cojones!* and a lot of good they're doing you and who are *you,* if I may make so bold?"

He lifted the machine from his lap, laid it on the chair next to the bed and walked as best he could across the room to the dressing table. He looked at himself in the mirror and his mouth made shapes but said nothing. The words were being spoken inside his head.

What are you, Lang, a god damned *espión?* What are you, a traitor to Dolores? What do you believe and how did you come to believe it and is there *anything* that makes sense to you at all?

He held up one finger of his left hand and grasped it in his right fist. "One," he said, and his mind said, Franco is wrong and the government is right. *By osmosis, like Elliman.*

"Two," he said aloud, grasping another finger, and his mind said, The Communists are right and the others are wrong. Who are the others? Unamuno the Mystic or Lang the Liberal or Roosevelt the Politician or the British owners of the Rio Tinto mines or the DuPont Corporation? You're god damned right they're wrong. They will conquer but they will never convince.

"All right," his voice said aloud. "No! They will *not* conquer neither will they convince. What *are* you, a defeatist?" And his mind said, What're you going to do about it? And his mind answered, *Nada.* You are going to the fascist side to see if fascists are fascists. But you are going. And you will find out (surprise!) that they *are* fascists. They will even tell you so if you ask them.

"Dolores!" his voice said aloud and his face was contorted and he spun on his heel and ran for the bed, threw himself full-length on it and sobbed out loud.

10

November 25, 1947

"The fact of the matter is," said Lang, staring at the ceiling and blowing smoke through his nostrils, "I didn't open my yap about the committee. I meant to talk about this the day after that broadcast, but it's taken me a good two weeks to get around to it—even with you."

Dr. Morton said, "Mmmm."

"It wasn't Flax's worrying about it that touted me off, either. At least I don't think so. When I came to, the next day, the whole idea of blasting the committee had evaporated with the alcohol in my bloodstream or been burned up with it.

"I have to recognize the simple fact that I suppressed my intention to take off after those bastards, and the last two broadcasts haven't had anything to do with them.

"I'm ashamed of this. Ashamed of my fear. But that isn't all. The events that followed, in order, have made the fear larger than it must have been originally.

"Yesterday, for example, was the red-letter day. Yesterday the Hollywood people were actually cited for contempt by the House of Representatives. Red letter—that's a hot one! Overwhelming vote, with no more than a handful of congressmen having the guts to stand up and fight. I put in a call to a friend down there and this afternoon the *Congressional Record* arrived airmail special.

"You wouldn't believe it, to read that debate. These are not elected representatives of the people. These are wild men! They permitted the most outrageous statements to be made without challenge. They even let McDowell of Pennsylvania get away with calling one of the screen-writers a Colonel in the Red Army!

"I know that guy," Lang said, turning to look at Morton. "One of the sweetest, kindest, most considerate human beings I've ever met.

"The moment it penetrated my thick skull that they had actually cited these people and apparently intend to prosecute them, my mind did a flipflop. I suddenly remembered—how I'd forgotten I don't know—that the officers of the Spanish Refugee Committee had also been cited.

"I began to do some research in the *New York Times* index and got a friend on the paper to plow through the morgue, and I discovered that the whole damned board of the committee had not only

been cited last year by a vote of 292 to 56, but that they were all tried in June of this year and sentenced in July.

"Dr. Barsky, the head of the committee, got six months; the rest, three. A few of them had weaseled out earlier, purged themselves of contempt. I was staggered to discover that all these people are now actually out on bail and on appeal.

"Do you know Dr. Barsky?" Lang said, looking at Morton again.

"By reputation," said the analyst. "What do you suppose made you forget all this?"

"How should I know?" said Lang. "And I can't understand why this shook me so much either, except that I've done a lot of work for that committee in the past, appeared for them, spoken for them, contributed, written appeals and leaflets and articles and broadcasts about the Spanish refugees.

"How could I have done anything else? After all, I *saw* those people. Not only in Spain, fighting the war, but crossing the border into France when Catalonia collapsed—three hundred thousand of them—and being thrown into concentration camps on the French coast at Argèles-sur-Mer, sick, wounded, women, children, babies, with no attention, not even any shelter in mid-winter.

"I tell you, Everett," he said passionately, "France will never live that down. Never. Those people died like flies. They were beaten by Senegalese guards, laughed at, mocked, starved half to death, thousands of them were turned over to Franco—"

He paused, took a deep breath and waited till his excitement had died down. "So I became convinced," he went on, "that a pattern was developing and that my being called by the committee was part of that developing pattern. Not very bright of me not to have seen it before, but that's that.

"All this happened before I came up here yesterday, and if I was more incoherent than usual, it's because I wanted a drink more than usual but didn't want to turn up here plastered.

"When I got downtown again I was scarcely civil to my wife at dinner, and during dinner a telegram arrived announcing that the committee had set a date for me to appear again in executive session on the eighth of next month."

"So?" said Morton, his face almost showing some animation.

"I didn't believe it myself for a moment. And if you think that wasn't enough to set me off, right after dinner the bell rang and I opened the door myself.

"There were two young squirts there who gave the impression of looking exactly alike, even though they really didn't look alike at all. They were as deferential as autograph hunters and flashed badges at me that were pinned inside small leather wallets—FBI."

"Mmmm," said Morton.

"For Christ's sake stop saying, Mmmm!" said Lang, twisting on the couch and glaring at Morton. Everett smiled and said, "Go on."

"I don't know whether I will or not! I don't even know why I'm spilling all this to you, anyhow. Expect that I realize I *am* afraid. Of what I don't know."

"Much would depend," said Morton, "on what they wanted of you."

"Brilliant!" said Lang without looking at the analyst, pulling a cigarette from his side pocket and lighting it from the stub of the old one. He stared at the branching crack in the ceiling and thought to himself, go on with it. It doesn't matter what this jerk has to say or doesn't say. What matters is getting it off your chest. Morton remained silent.

"I can't figure out yet what they *did* want," Lang continued. "Listening to them, talking to them was like swimming in molasses or interviewing some God damned diplomatic cookie-pusher.

"They were exceedingly polite. They went over my first appearance before the committee, and my war service. I was in public relations, attached to Eisenhower's SHAEF, and they wanted to know how I'd got the commission and who had recommended me and all that sort of stuff.

"They also wanted to know what were my relations with Roosevelt and whether I had gone through OSS (I hadn't) and such irrelevant things as the date I went to Hollywood last year to do that picture for Columbia, and when I came back and how I happened to hire Peggy O'Brien."

"O'Brien?"

"My secretary," said Lang. "She was assigned to me at Columbia out of the stenographic pool, and she's a crackerjack operator. I rescued her from that ass-hole of creation and brought her East."

"Mmmm."

"The whole conversation was thoroughly unsatisfactory. They gave the impression throughout—without exactly saying it—that they knew a good deal more about me than they were letting on.

"What the hell they know, I can't imagine. I've never committed a crime in my life if you except the fact that when I was working my way through college in Seattle I used to swipe books from the University bookstore for the simple reason that I didn't have the money to buy them.

"I even stole books after I left college, whenever I got a chance, and until I got my first reporting job on the *P.-I.* and was making enough to live on. But all this happened more than twenty-five years ago."

"Why did you never mention this before?"

"It never occurred to me."

"Maybe it occurred but you didn't want to talk about it."

"Maybe it did."

He sighed and decided, This is the last time I come here if I *bust*. He waited a few moments to see if the headshrinker would interrupt again, then continued.

"Anne naturally wanted to know who the callers were and I lied to her and said they were some theatrical people who were interested in my play—I haven't written a word on it for two weeks now, curiously enough—and I said I had to go out.

"I wanted to get out of the house. I didn't want to face an evening with her and her accusing eyes—"

"Why did you say that?"

"Say what?"

"Accusing eyes."

Lang was stopped dead and couldn't reply for a few moments. Then he said angrily, "I suppose I have guilt feelings about Anne. Guilt that I don't love her. Guilt that I never really loved her. Guilt that I two-time her and treat her badly. Guilt that I haven't had the guts to leave her.

"But before I got a chance to leave—I did go out later—I got a phone call and went to my study to take it. It was my friend on the *Times* and what he told me really floored me.

"This may sound curious to you, and I can't explain exactly why it should have hit me so hard, but he said he'd been looking through the press releases put out by the Spanish Refugee Committee, and he discovered a fact he thought would interest me.

"It interested me all right. It rocked me back on my heels."

Lang turned on the couch and looked at Everett Morton, who was sitting on the Chesterfield with his chin in one hand staring at the point of his elegant shoe.

"The entire investigation of the executive board of the Spanish committee was held in executive session. *All* the hearings. That means, no newspapermen were there. None.

"Nevertheless, an account of the testimony of one of the doctors—they had a couple of other doctors on the committee besides Barsky—was published in a Madrid newspaper within forty-eight hours after he testified!" Lang sat up on the couch and faced the doctor.

"Did you hear me? *In a fascist newspaper in Madrid!*"

"Mmmm!"

"Is *that* all you can say?" Lang shouted.

11

August 19, 1938

The shelling started at noon and it was unbearable. It was much worse because of the position they occupied astride a bare, rocky hill overlooking Gandesa that had no soil in which to dig trenches and was completely exposed to the automatic batteries below.

The shells (the battalion *observadores* informed Ben Blau) were falling at the rate of one hundred and twenty a minute, and Ben was afraid the position would rapidly become untenable.

It was a key position that had been held by Lister's division, captured by the fascists, retaken by the Listers, bombed with incendiaries that burned off the sparse shrubbery leaving nothing but tough, short stems that caught the men's trousers and tripped them up.

It was a position that would *have* to be held, for it was the tip of the enormous wedge the Army of the Ebro had driven into the fascist positions on the south side of the river following the spectacular crossing on the twenty-fifth of July.

Gandesa, their intelligence told them, was the central fortified position of the fascists. If it could be taken it might be possible to plow all the way through the corridor that had been pushed to the sea last April, relieve the enormous pressure on Valencia and reestablish direct communication with the south.

Once the river was crossed Ben stopped feeling self-conscious about his temporary commission as lieutenant and his command of the newly-rebuilt company. It was eighty percent Spanish replacements, but until the brigade reached the Sierra Pandóls, the offensive had been a walkover.

Taken completely by surprise, the fascists had abandoned the entire river-front and recoiled south, and the Army of the Ebro swept across from Flix in the north to Tortosa on the Mediterranean without encountering serious opposition.

Now, three weeks later and only an arms-length from the supply-base and bastion of Gandesa, the opposition had materialized—but with a vengeance. Not that they hadn't lost men on the march from the river; they had lost plenty. They had lost them near Villalba and attacking Hill 386 three times in one day, but they had taken Fatarella, Flix and Mora, together with some three thousand prisoners who surrendered without any resistance whatsoever.

They had lost more men in a bottle-necked *barranca* when the fascists filled it with artillery shells and there was nothing to do but

climb the sides of the gulch and seek what shelter could be found.

They had lost still more in a fire-fight near Corbera, a harmless town on the highway between Mora del Ebro and Gandesa that had been flattened by fascist aviation immediately after the first elements of the Internationals had passed through. The stench of the dead was solid among the tumbled buildings and hung in the air like fog.

Now they had been three days on top of the bare, windswept hills overlooking Gandesa and Franco had brought artillery and aviation up from the south in quantity. The objective was only three kilometers below them, in plain sight and flanked on three sides, but they were pinned to the rocks.

Handling his company, dispersing his men on the bare face of the mountain, his replacements (such as they were) below him in the fold of the hill, Blau no longer felt like an inexperienced stage-director trying to prevent his actors from stumbling over each other's feet.

The day after Lang came up to the Darmos rest area, Busch, who had come back from Brigade, took Ben aside and said, "Blau, what military experience do you have?"

Ben knew immediately that while he might have told the people in Albacete he had had six years of National Guard training, he couldn't get away with it with Busch. So he looked him in the eyes and said, "None."

Busch grinned. He had seen Blau's papers. "I have a hunch," he said, "that with some effort we might make a decent *cabo* out of you."

"What makes you think so?"

"Just a hunch," said the twenty-four-year-old battalion commander. "I'm sending you to NCO school. Get your gear together."

So on May Day Ben had been sent to NCO school where he spent a month learning the rudiments of commanding a squad of men. The training was sketchy but couldn't have been otherwise under the circumstances. The only good thing about it, he felt at the time, was that it did get him into excellent physical shape.

When he got back to the Brigade in June he was given a squad to command. They were mostly new Spanish kids, so young that he felt sorry for them. But his Spanish had improved and they liked him and almost regarded him as a father.

Throughout June and early July the battalion and the brigade itself were involved in intensive maneuvers, most of which were designed to train them in crossing an imaginary river that everyone knew was the Ebro.

And when they crossed the river on July 25, Ben was in command

of a platoon with the temporary rank of sergeant, and that was when his actual training began. Like most commanders in the *Ejército Populár* he was learning the science of war by practising it. He was learning to command by commanding, and if there were vast lacunae in his knowledge of strategy and tactics (even on a *pelotón* level) he was picking up experience every moment of the day and night.

In the bottle-necked *barranca* where they had been caught by artillery, the company commander was badly wounded. Ben and two other guys managed to get him out of the range of the shells, and Ben assumed command of the company without anyone telling him to do so.

They were stuck in that hole for two days and he reorganized the company and automatically led it when it broke out of the *barranca* and then was forced to retreat in order to avoid heavy casualties. It amused him that he was rising from the ranks not out of any inherent talent for command but practically out of seniority and survival. And he asked Busch when they went through Piñel and climbed Hill 666 to relieve him of the company.

"What for?" said Busch. "You're doing OK."

"I'll lose the whole damn company if you don't."

"Balls," said Busch. "But if you do I'll have you shot. Stay where you are and do the best you can."

"But damn it all, Ed," said Ben. "I don't feel competent to hold the job. I don't know my ass from a hot rock."

"You'll learn the difference," Busch said.

Now, with his Spanish adjutant, Teopisto, wounded, Ben made Joe Faber *sargento-ayudante,* placed him at a field-telephone in the company command-post (a bare rock surface around which Faber piled broken boulders and shards of exploded artillery shells) and told him to stay there.

With his commissar, Archie, a San Francisco longshoreman, he stayed in the non-existent lines on top of the hill until the anti-tank guns began to find the range and pick men off the crest like snipers' rifles.

When the men moved back, mortars (which could not be heard coming) began to land on the lee of the hill. They could hear the fascist aviation bombing the crossroads near Piñel, Corbera (again) and the highway to the river, which was the main line of communication for the entire operation.

The telephone went out a half-hour after the shelling began and the telephonist, Felix, was put out of commission at the same time. Ben sent one of his *enlaces* down the hill and around its flank to battalion headquarters to alert Busch to his situation.

He looked at the soot-blackened faces of the men around him, and they reflected his own fear and frustration. Their eyes seemed enormous and unusually white. How was it going to be possible to hold this knob in the middle of nothing in the face of this kind of attack? The men looked at him, waiting for him to do something. He felt he knew what they were waiting for. They were waiting for an order to withdraw. He was waiting for such an order himself and he knew it wouldn't come. The fact of the matter was, they had been placed on that spot because Valledór, the Brigade commander, knew that if anyone could hold the position, it was the Lincolns.

Ben turned and looked down toward the command post he had established, saw the men of his company *plana mayor* huddled still further downhill, next to a bluff. Faber was out of sight below his pathetic parapet with a dead telephone. Ben wanted to go down to him because he had an idea how Faber was feeling. The mortars, skimming the crest, were landing all around him.

It had taken a full hour to get stretcher-bearers for Felix, whose leg was shattered below the knee, and the white heat of August was unbearable. It beat on their heads like a hammer. Ben found a canteen lying next to him and sucked some of the warm iodinized water laced with bad Spanish *coñac* that tasted more like paint-remover than any potable liquid.

Nat, who was lying next to him, said, "You dropped something, comrade," and Ben looked at the ground. It was the letter from Ferguson, managing editor of the *Globe-Times,* that had fallen out of the breast pocket of the coveralls he was wearing.

Ben laughed and Nat said, "Love letter?"

"Yeah," said Ben, handing it to Nat. "You'll get a bang out of it."

It had come while he was still in NCO school and he was still carrying it around, intending to answer it. Nat read:

I cannot remember when any member of the staff of this newspaper has never behaved with comparable irresponsibility. I don't suppose there's any point in firing you since you've fired yourself, but I might as well tell you that so far as this paper is concerned, you're a dead duck in more ways than one. I have sent a photostatic copy of your cablegram to the New York Newspaper Guild, with an official complaint from the front office. Not that I imagine this will faze you or the like-minded characters who run the Guild. But perhaps it's all for the best, as you were beginning to outlive your usefulness. Your stories made it quite plain that you have swallowed the Red propaganda line, hook, line and sinker. They

were no more than government handouts and we printed none of the last five you were so gracious as to send . . .

Nat handed the letter back and said, "Guess your heart's broken, ain't it?"

"In seventeen places," said Ben.

He noticed that Nat's trousers were ripped in the crotch so that his testicles were hanging out, and nodded to him.

"Better tuck 'em in, boy. You're going to need them."

"Yeah?" said Nat. "When?"

Ben began to think he would have to get back to battalion to see what Busch wanted—no runners had come through—when he saw two crouching men loping through the fire. One had a spool of wire on his back that was unreeling behind him as he ran; the other was Felix's replacement, Joe Kelley, who called himself the best Catholic in the International Brigades.

Ben smiled and turned to the other men huddled near him. "Look, guys," he said. "Garbo *talks!*" Nobody laughed...

The excitement in Barcelona since the crossing of the Ebro had been enormous. The offensive itself, prepared for months under the tightest security—and at a time when everyone seemed convinced of ultimate defeat—was so complete a success that it caught Franco's forces, which were driving on Valencia and Castellón de la Plana, totally unprepared.

On a front of over one hundred and fifty kilometers, the Army of the Ebro, eighty thousand strong, had crossed in row-boats, thrown up pontoon bridges and even waded and moved so swiftly that it was almost a full week before its service of supply could catch up to it. In the first forty-eight hours it had taken six hundred square miles of territory.

A new spirit swept the capital of Cataluña. Throngs crowded the streets and plazas all day waiting for bulletins. *Pasionaria's* words at the May meeting of the Communist Party *plenum* were recalled and repeated everywhere:

Our resistance has not only given the world fresh proof of the virility, fighting power, organization, heroism and self-confidence of the Spanish people, but it has also given rise to a new international situation . . . a front of counteraction to the fascist plans of conquest has begun . . .

Lang was more impressed, however, by another statement she had made and which, at the time, he had considered mere wishful thinking and morale-building: . . . *Spain has sufficient resources not only to halt the advance of the invaders but to repulse them and utterly rout them.*

If an action on so grand a scale could have been prepared and secured, launched and unfolded with such skill and timing, who could say what people were not capable of doing when they were determined not to be thrown back into the Middle Ages?

Every foreign correspondent in Barcelona had managed to get a car to visit the front—except Francis X. Lang. He had returned from France and the Franco side after the offensive began on July 25. In fact, he had heard *Pasionaria* speak in Paris on the 26th at the Vel d'Hiver one day after the river was crossed, and *that* was a meeting that would live even longer in his memory, he was sure, than the party *plenum* in Madrid.

By the time Lang got to Constancia de la Mora's office on his return the first week in August, all the other correspondents had beaten him to the punch and Dolores Muñoz hadn't been able to do a thing for him.

He went, therefore, to the *comisariado* of the International Brigades at Pasaje Mendez Vigo No. 5 and asked what *they* could do for him.

On the afternoon of the 18th he finally managed to get a date with Dolores for dinner and, he felt sure, the evening. Like her chief, she had been snowed under by the correspondents but she met him in the dining room of the Majestic.

"Did you get transportation?" she said and he noticed with some satisfaction that her small heart-shaped face showed concern.

He nodded and said, "I'm leaving late tonight on the press-truck from I. B. headquarters."

"There's a big fight going on, I hear."

"That's what I want to find out about."

"You will be careful, Francisco."

He laughed. "I'll wear my rubbers," he said. "So far they haven't let me nearer the front than Brigade headquarters. I want to get up to the Lincolns if I can."

There was an awkward pause as the waiter served them and he heard himself saying, "Have you heard anything?"

She knew what he was referring to and shook her head. He bit his lip.

So she changed the subject and said, "I never did find out what happened to you on the other side."

"Nothing," he said. " I didn't stay long enough for anything to happen. The *Times* man fingered me. Which might have been a favor, depending on how you look at it."

"Fingered?"

"An old gangster expression," he said. "He let them know that my sympathies weren't exactly on that side, and after I had the

interview with Franco, I was told, oh most politely, that I was no longer *persona grata.*" He laughed.

"You know," he said, "there's a persistent rumor that the *Times* man goes around in a fascist uniform but I never caught him at it. I never caught him sober, either."

"After the government asked him to leave this side," Dolores said, "he published a dispatch from France giving the exact location of every anti-aircraft battery in Madrid."

"I know," said Lang. He was aware that their conversation was at cross-purposes, that she was saying nothing she particularly wanted to say, and neither was he. He heard the question in her mind, so he answered it.

"I'm sorry this happened," he said. "I had applied to visit San Pedro de Cardenas prison and the camps at Santander and Zaragossa; to try to locate some missing Internationals and perhaps your friend. This permission was never granted."

"What is he like?" she said. "I saw him once long before the rebellion, but never to speak to."

"You mean Franco?" She nodded and he laughed.

"He can exude a sort of oily charm," Lang said. Then his face screwed up and he said, "You know, *querida,* the villains, the corrupt, the really evil people of this world don't look that way when you meet them. Don't speak that way, either. The movies are responsible for giving us the idea that a villain has an 'evil' face which is always lighted from below.

"This Franco looks like a small-town grocer. Or butcher. Most butchers I've known don't feel anything about their trade. They aren't repulsed by it or sickened by the sight of blood. And your Franco rarely sees the blood, you know."

"Not *my* Franco," she smiled.

"Let's say *our* Franco. We'll have him around for awhile."

"But not for long," she said with sudden determination and he was tickled by the way her soft underlip shot out like a small child's lip when it pouts. If I stay alive long enough, he thought, I can win her. If I don't get killed at the front.

He laughed. "You know," he said, "I played with the idea, when I was waiting for the interview, of killing *el puto.* I planned to use my bare hands, not having a gun and figuring they would search me anyhow before I went into his office. They did."

"How silly," she said.

"*Is* it silly?"

"Of course. Franco is more than Franco. That you know."

"I know," he said, "but somehow I was thinking in terms of my

old admiration, Cyrano de Bergerac. You know, *'Mais quel geste!'* It would have been as good a way to die as any."

"Do you want to die?"

"Not particularly," he said, filling her glass. "But then I don't particularly want to live, either." (He realized immediately that it sounded utterly absurd and hoped she wouldn't comment on it.)

She did not pick up the remark but went straight to the heart of what he was feeling or thought he was feeling.

"I have been thinking a lot about you since May," she said. "Especially since you went to Burgos and then to Paris."

"I'm flattered."

"Don't look like that, Zav," she said sternly, pronouncing the Z like *th*. "I'm going to give you a lecture now."

"It's an occupational disease with you people," he said. *"Los rojos."* The bitterness of the remark, he realized, had something to do with a premonition of what she was going to say.

"Then I won't."

"No, no," he said, reaching across the table for her hand. *"Please* give me a lecture."

"It will not be a lecture. It will be advice from one friend to another." She sighed and took a deep breath. "You do not love me, Zav."

"No?"

"No," she said. "You have confused me with what you feel about Spain. No," she said, "don't interrupt till I'm finished. Then you may tell me I am wrong."

"All right," he said.

"So many of you, Americans like you I mean, like Elliman and Hemingway and Sheean—not so much Matthews—he is a cynic—but there are others, have been overcome with emotion here in Spain."

"That's bad?"

"No," she said. "It is good . . . on one *nivel.* What is happening here is terrible, one of the most terrible things that has ever happened to people anywhere, and it is right that the decent people should become deeply involved in this. It is the proof of their decency.

"But there is also a danger in this emotion, and that is what may happen to *you,* my friend."

"You *are* giving a lecture, *pequeña,*" he said.

"*Claro.* If there is emotion without solid understanding, Francisco, something dreadful is likely to happen. It is romanticism."

He was confused and his face showed it. "You say you are in love with me (he nodded) but this is not true. You are in love with

Spain. You are in love with what has happened to you here. You are in love with our people and with the potential all people have for decency and kindliness and love."

"Nuts," he said.

"Perdón?"

"Skip it, I didn't mean to interrupt."

"You have never experienced this before, you told me. It is an overwhelming experience and it comes only in times of great collective effort, when there is agreement among people and determination. That is when you see it, when they work together, truly, not for their individual welfare alone, but for their collective welfare." He nodded.

"If we should lose," she said and ignored the expression on his face, "then it is that you will have to watch yourself. You may lose your balance."

"I don't understand."

"A defeat would be dreadful, far more dreadful than anything we have suffered so far, my friend. We would fight again—in years, perhaps decades. But our defeat would throw many good people into despair—you among them. And from despair it is not far to fall into cynicism."

"I understand now."

"I don't think you do, Francisco. But I think you will."

"You know, you're slightly insulting when you imply that I have the emotion but not the understanding."

"I did not mean to insult you."

"Do I have to have the same kind of understanding that *you* have? Or your party?"

"Of course not." She took his hand across the table. "I did not tell you earlier, but I must work at the bureau tonight. Please call me the minute you get back."

"OK," he said. "I can take a hint."

"Perdón?"

"Skip it," he said, rising as she rose . . .

The telephone wire was broken by the shelling almost as soon as it was laid, and the shelling was consistent. The men of Ben's company lay flattened to the broken rock in the hammering heat.

Then the big one came over and Ben heard it explode down the slope behind him, and almost simultaneously a man was screaming, screaming. He knew without being able to see that it was Joe Faber and he said to Archie, "Take over," and ran down the hill toward the company command post.

He saw Joe almost immediately, lying in his blood in the pathetic

little circle of broken rocks he had piled up, and he saw the men of the company *plana-mayor* stand up from behind the shelter of the rocks. One of them ran pell-mell down the hill and the others started to follow.

Ben pulled his pistol pointing it at them, shouted, *"Abajo!"* They looked at him, then slowly crouched down again. What if they had run? Ben was thinking. Would I have been able to shoot them?

He glanced at Joe, who was fully conscious, his back and belly torn by the hot metal. Yellow dust still lay in a cloud over the flank of the hill, and the bitter smell of the HE. If I hadn't pinned him here myself, Ben thought, he'd be OK. He shouted, *"Camilleros! camilleros!"* but no stretcher-bearers were in sight or hearing.

He glanced at the place where the men of the company staff were hiding and yelled, *"Secretario! Barbero! Ayúdame!"*

From behind the boulders came the two men, Ramon and Angel, and Ben said they would have to help carry Joe back to the classification-post. He would accompany them. They laid a blanket on the ground and gently lifted Joe into it. His eyes watched them though he said nothing. He tried to smile at Ben.

"It's OK, Joe," Ben said. "It'll be OK. *Cuidado!"* he said to the two badly frightened men as they lifted Joe. They started slowly down the flank of the hill . . .

Major Busch was on the field-telephone in the shallow cave behind the rocky hill when Lang staggered up the grade. The battalion commander saw him coming but did not lift his hand in greeting.

"Oiga! Oiga!" said Busch into the phone, then blew into it. He listened a moment, apparently got a reply and added, *"Póngame con la segunda!"* Lang dropped to the ground a few feet away and sat there gasping. A soldier gave him a drink of vile tasting water from a *bota.*

"What the hell's happening up there?" Busch said suddenly and heard Archie's voice, sounding thin along the wire and mixed with oddly distorted sounds: explosions and the shriek of flying metal.

He listened carefully to what the company political officer said, then answered, "Keep a few men in the line. Let the rest take cover. The British are extending their lines toward you. Better get some ammo up. There may be a counterattack. Where the hell is Blau?"

Busch listened and said "Oh," then hung up, shaking his head. Lang was looking around. He saw that a dressing station had been set up outside the command post in the thin shadow of an over-

hanging bluff. Several men lay in stretchers and one small, fat doctor who wore thick glasses was working on them. As another stretcher came in, carried by two utterly drenched and exhausted *camilleros,* Busch came over and took Lang's hand.

"You must have a nose for news," he said and Lang noticed for the first time that he had shaved off the enormous mustaches. "They're trying to blow us off the hill."

The two men went over to look at the man in the stretcher. It was Felix, the telephonist. He had a cigarette (unlit) dangling from his lower lip and his eyes were half-closed. Lang was slightly sickened by the sight of the man's smashed leg and turned his eyes away. The fat little doctor came over to Felix and began to cut away the trouser leg.

There were a few runners sitting around with their backs to the bluff, other men whose jobs Zav couldn't figure out, a couple of mules tethered in the shade of a cork tree. These were obviously the only *transporte* for the wounded of for food or ammunition down the two miles of winding mountain path to the highway.

"What's going on in the world?" said Busch, filling his pipe from a leather pouch. Lang noticed a book lying on a rock near the battalion commander and picked it up. It was Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain.* How queer, he thought.

He told Busch about the great impression the offensive had created not only in Spain but throughout Europe and America. Mass meetings everywhere, he said, were demanding again that the embargo be lifted. People who had not been vocal in a year were beginning to speak up.

"That's good," said Busch, "but what's really happening?"

"Hitler's mobilized a million and a half men," said Lang. "For maneuvers, he says."

"Yeah," said Busch, "maneuvers against Czechoslovakia."

The telephone called Busch and he left Lang sitting against the open mouth of the shallow cave. There was a group of men squatting below him and standing in front of them another man who was holding forth vehemently about something.

He was half asleep with the fatigue and the heat, watching the soldier standing twenty feet below him on the hill waving his arms and gesticulating. He was speaking Catalan and Lang couldn't get more than a word or so of it. Then there was a high screaming wail and a geyser of earth shot up in the air somewhere down the slope, and a deafening explosion momentarily blinded him. He had no time to duck or fall flat though the men in front of him had done so—all except the man who was standing.

He stood for a moment then toppled backward. When the earth

and stones had stopped falling the entire group sprang up and ran forward, the small fat doctor, Busch came racing from the cave behind him and Lang stood up and looked, unsteady on his feet

They formed a group around the fallen man. "Stray shell," somebody said and the doctor examined the man, whose face was pale He turned the fallen man's head gently, then withdrew the hand that had supported the head. It was red with blood.

He looked up through his heavy lenses and said with mild astonishment, "Back of the head. Shrapnel. If he'd been sitting down, he'd be OK. Anybody else hurt?" Nobody said anything The doctor picked up a blanket and stretched it over the man, covering his face.

"Take him away," said Busch, "and bury him." He turned away from Lang and Lang did not follow him. Two of the runners picked up the body and disappeared around the path with it. Two others followed with shovels. From the other side two soldiers appeared with another wounded man carried in a blanket and set him down. Immediately behind them came a soldier, his ragged overalls torn and filthy, his face cadaverous and black as a coal-miner's, his white eyes bulging in his head.

Until Busch said, "What's up, Blau?" Lang didn't recognize Ben

"It's Joe," said Ben, indicating the man on the earth. "It's OK Archie's in command. They've slacked off."

"Oh," said Busch and Lang said, "Hello Ben." Ben looked at Zav and nodded, apparently too confused to recognize him. They stood around the blanket as the battalion doctor examined Joe Faber.

"Mortar," said Ben.

Lang wanted not to look. This was much worse than anything he had ever seen before but his mind told him: if they can live through it *you* can look at it and he forced himself to watch as the *medico's* red hands moved over Faber's torn body.

Joe was perfectly conscious. He looked around, waved a cigarette away that Ben offered and noticed Lang. "Hello, writer," he said and smiled.

"Hello, Joe, *que tal?*"

"I guess you can write the book after all," said Faber. "Did you mail my journal?"

"From Paris," said Lang, suddenly overwhelmed with shame.

Faber looked at Busch and said, *"Comandante,* I'm sorry."

"What for, Joe?" said Busch.

"I'm not a very good soldier, Ed."

"None better," said Busch.

"Gracias."

Faber turned his head to find Blau but he spoke to Lang instead.

"You can write now, Ben," he said. "The address I gave you before we crossed . . ." He started to cough and the beautiful bright blood flowed from his mouth and ran down his cheek to the earth.

"No," said Ben and Lang looked at him. There were white rivers running down his blackened cheeks. He took the cigarette he was still holding in his fingers, stuck it in his mouth and chewed on it, then spit it out. Lang offered him another, lit it for him.

Ben looked at him for the first time and said, "Hello Zav."

"I'm sorry." He noticed out of the corners of his eyes that two men were taking Faber's body away, heard the field telephone buzz and Busch saying, *"Aqui el cincuenta-ocho.* Busch."

Ben suddenly dropped to the ground and Lang sat down beside him. "I'm pooped," said Ben.

Lang said nothing. He didn't know what to say. He had a wild impulse to tell Ben that he had given Faber's notebook to the American military *attaché,* but he suppressed the impulse.

Ben smoked awhile, then turned to Lang and said, "I'm glad you mailed his notebook." Lang blushed but Ben didn't notice it. "I hear you were on Franco's side this summer."

"I was."

"Have fun?"

"Scarcely."

"Good food, I'll bet."

"Plenty. Offhand, it doesn't look much different than here. Then you begin to notice."

"What?"

"I attended mass in Burgos Cathedral. First time in over fifteen years. My former church is in its glory there. Never saw such rich vestments—even in Rome. I even met a priest at a meeting packing a pistol over his cassock. Told me he had personally killed six Marxists. He had notches cut in the grip. Showed 'em to me."

Ben looked at him. "Charming," he said. "You didn't stay long."

"No, they threw me out."

"You couldn't have a better recommendation."

Lang tried to account for the bitterness in Blau's remark. He couldn't. He looked at the man staring at the ground between his frayed *alpargatas.* He had an impulse to say, Well, you asked for it; how do you like it? but knew that it would be impossible to say such a thing. Instead he said. "You don't like me very much, do you?"

Blau looked at him with surprise. "To the contrary. I've always admired you. You're one of the best writers in the country and you could be a lot better if—" He didn't complete the sentence but grinned. "How's Dolores Muñoz?" he said.

"Fine." Lang wanted to ask what he meant by that "if" but thought better of it. He noticed the two gold bars embroidered on a patch pinned to Ben's coveralls and said, "You've been promoted."

"I have a company," Ben said listlessly.

"Pláceme, teniente, or is it *capitán?"*

"Thanks," said Ben.

"After this action, maybe you can get leave and run down to Barcelona. Dolores and I'll fix you up a meal fit for a king."

"After this action—" Ben started to say, then fell silent. He was listening. They were both listening to the echoing reverberations of the shelling on the other side of the bald dome of the hill.

Ben handed Lang the letter he was carrying in his breast pocket and said, "This will amuse you."

Lang read Ferguson's letter and said, "The dirty son-of-a-bitch. You want me to tell him off?"

"What for?"

"If you ever need a job, you come to *me, compañero,"* said Lang. "And no crap."

"Thanks," said Ben, still listening to the artillery. I cannot live without that Joe, he was thinking. There is no point in living without that man. He got up. "Got to get back to my company," he said and put out his hand. "Keep your head down, Lang."

"I'll do that."

"And write a piece about Joe. We lost a better writer in him than either of us could ever be."

Busch came out of the command post and said, "I'll go back with you, Ben. Brigade wants an attack tonight or tomorrow. Promises aviation and artillery. See you," he said to Lang.

"Soon," said Zav.

"Say," Busch turned, one arm around Ben's shoulders. "When you come back up you might bring some good pipe tobacco. I'm sick of this Dutch stuff, tastes like horse-hair."

"I'll *do* that," Lang said and watched them walking up the path that led around the *barranca* that climbed the hill numbered 666 on their maps. He was lonesome . . .

When Lang entered his room he found Clem Elliman sprawled in the one arm-chair with two bottles of Bushmill's on the table beside him. One was half-empty. He lifted the glass in his hand and held it out to Lang.

"Back from the wars, soldier?" he roared.

"What the hell are *you* doing here?"

"Drinking," said Clem. "I'm making a study of it. I aim to have

you make a study of it with me . . . tonight." (He had suddenly assumed a phony Western accent.)

"Not tonight, Clem. I've got a date."

"What's in a date?" said Elliman. "A date by any other name doesn't carry half the muzzle-velocity of Bushmill's."

"How would *you* know?"

"Drink," Clem said soberly and Lang, figuring that he was still manageable said, "Look, Clem, roll your hoop, will you?"

"I will roll my hoop," said Elliman, "when the time is ripe. The time," he said slowly, measuring every syllable, "is-not-ripe."

"It couldn't be much riper," said Lang with annoyance and Clem held up one finger.

"Wrong, my fine-feathered friend," he said. "It would surprise you how much riper it can get. Death," he said suddenly in a voice of doom, "is no respecter of ripeness. *Salud!*" He tossed the glass off like water, then added, "King Lear said something about ripeness but I don't remember what it was."

"I'm not interested in death," said Lang. "I had enough of it for one day. I'm interested in life." And he added, "Tonight," without meaning to.

"Ah," said Elliman, "but you *should* be. 'By my troth, I care not: a man can die but once; we owe God a death . . . and let it go which way it will, he that dies this year is quit for the next.' *That* one I remember. Henry the Fourth, Part Two."

"Oh balls," said Lang.

Elliman ignored the remark but went right on. "As *Time* has a way of saying *ad nauseam*: 'As it must to every man, death came today to—' "

"Clem," said Lang, "you're a great guy and I love you. But tonight I don't love you—"

"I know—"

"No, you don't. But it's true."

"I love you, too," said Elliman. "I rate you a man. By me that's a compliment. You know that."

"I know it."

"Muy hombre," said Clem, *"y cojones."*

"I thank you. My father thanks you, my mother thanks you and my grandfather thanks you."

"Then *be* a man," said Clem, gripping Lang's shoulders with his powerful fingers.

"I'll try."

"Try *hard,* Zav. I'm sure you can make it. Repeat after me: I shit on death."

"OK," said Lang. *"Me cago en la muerte."*

"Roll with the punches," said Clem, feinting a left hook.

"OK."

"Dolores is dead."

Lang looked at him but didn't say anything. The man was obviously serious and he wasn't drunk at all.

"In the bombing," said Clem. "This afternoon."

12

November 27, 1947

"That was the time that I really flipped my lid," said Lang, examining the branching crack in the ceiling with more than ordinary interest. It seemed to him that it had grown since he saw it last, two days before. It was beginning to look something like a spider-web.

"That was when I *really* needed the services of a head-shrinker. Not now." He added the last phrase to see if Everett would say anything. He didn't. Maybe this guy isn't so bad after all, Lang thought.

"Clem stayed with me that night. We drank the bottle and a half and he got more from his own room. How much we finished I don't know. I have no recollection, as a matter of fact, of what happened for the next month. They told me later."

"Who told you?" said Morton.

"Clem, Anne, lots of people."

"Your wife—"

"After a month, it seems, they sent for her. Clem did. I had expanded the binge from where we left it off that night. I stayed in that room in the Majestic for two solid weeks, they told me, and sent out for meals maybe twice a week.

"Then I was removed from it when I was unconscious and I woke up in the International Brigade hospital at Mataró. Peculiar thing. Maybe it was the only place they had to put me.

"I escaped from that hospital, Clem said, and they caught me in a room in the Barrio Chino and put me into the other I. B. hospital at Las Planas. I escaped from that one too.

"That was when Clem cabled Anne. She caught the *Ile de France* and came over. I don't remember her arrival.

"In any event, she arrived and it was decided that my continued presence and the stories that were spreading had become an em-

barrassment, so I was removed. I was flown to France in a government plane and I spent two weeks in a hospital in Toulouse before they carted me to Paris to the American hospital."

"In all, how long were you in hospital?" Morton asked.

"I wouldn't know. Maybe Anne could resurrect the facts for you. It doesn't interest me."

"It would help to know," the doctor said in his best scientific manner, but Lang ignored the remark.

"There are two things that interest me more," he said. "What that woman must have gone throngh in that period with me half sane and half batty, kept under paraldehyde part of the time, geting a thrist as he lay there on the couch but didn't say anything more always seemed to be around.

Lang was silent for a long time, remembering. He was developing a thirst as he lay there on the couch but he didn't say anything till Morton asked, "What is the second thing that interest you?"

"Old Faithful," said Lang. "I can always count on you to get me back in the groove, can't I? The second thing that interests me is this. This experience apparently triggered off my alcoholism. I know it. In fact, I've known it for nine years now. Since I know what caused it, how come I can't lick it?"

"It's not as simple as that."

"*Claro,*" said Lang. "If it were, there wouldn't be any need to feed psychoanalysts, would there?"

"That is correct," Morton said smugly.

"How come," said Lang, "loving Dolores as I do—I mean did—, I can't resist any casual piece that comes along, so long as it's presentable?" He didn't wait for a comment from the doctor but went right on. "Of course, *that* particular itch antedates the long thirst. That goes way back."

"What did your mother look like?" asked Morton, and Lang turned his head and looked at him. "Come off it," he said with contempt.

"What did she look like, physically, I mean?"

Lang laughed loudly and said, "Here's where I cross you up! She was tall and well-upholstered, as Elliman puts it, with a bosom you could have laid a seven-course dinner on and a behind like a caboose. Does that answer your dirty little question?"

"Yes," said Morton.

"By December, the middle of December—or maybe it was earlier —I was well enough to leave the hospital and live in the George V. I've always been fond of that hotel. Anne took me on long walks through the Bois and the Luxembourg gardens. We visited the Louvre and the Sainte-Chapelle. Saw the Fratellini at the circus.

But I couldn't stay away from the Bar de l'Opéra and developed a passion for sherry—any Spanish sherry that was on tap: Sandeman's or Dry Sack, Fundador, it didn't matter.

"She tried to keep bottles away from me. Whenever she found a bottle, she hid it. She didn't have the heart to pour it down the toilet, I guess.

"But the more she hid bottles, the better places I found to hide them. And when I couldn't find a place to hide them, I decanted them into teapots, glasses, coffee cups, tin cans, thermos bottles, bottles labelled rubbing lotion and witch-hazel, anything I could find, and I hid those in odd places." He turned to look at Morton.

"Does this bore you?" he said.

"Nothing bores me," said the doctor.

"What a dull life you must lead. It bores *me*. She doesn't hide bottles any more; she has given it up or realized that that's no way to cure me. She sent me to you in the hope of curing me and pretty soon you're going to give the whole thing up as a bad job."

"Do you want to be cured?"

"No," said Lang. "And yes. Depending on what time of day it is, how I'm feeling, whether I'm working or not, how much food I have in my stomach, what I have read in the morning paper or the evening paper, who I've seen that day, what I've day-dreamed about, whether my wife attracts me or—as is more frequently the case—doesn't."

Then suddenly he said, "I want you to know, Everett, that no matter how much I resist you and the analysis, I appreciate what you're trying to do for me. I really do. I apologize for the bad times I've given you and I apologize in advance for the worse ones coming. I believe you're my friend."

"Forget it, Francis."

"I can't. I realize how lousy I've been to you, sarcastic, insulting—"

"It's my job to be insulted, Francis. You don't vary from the norm, believe me."

After a pause, Lang said, "That was the time I heard the Internationals had been withdrawn after Negrin made a great speech before the League of Nations. He said, we're withdrawing our foreign volunteers. Now. Today. In effect, he said to Hitler and Mussolini, 'Shit or get off the pot.' They only poured more men and material into Spain.

"I found out that Blau, Busch and a lot of the Americans were in Le Havre. There was a sort of deluxe concentration camp there that belonged to the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique—a de-

tention camp for aliens—and they were holding them there because the sailors were on strike and there was no ship to put them on.

"I went down to see them. I told Anne to stay in Paris and she agreed. I had started a book in a half-hearted way and she was encouraging me to write a play and thought it would be good for my morale to go alone, be on my own, see if I could handle myself. That was her mistake, but I enjoyed myself. I stayed at the Falcon and ate at La Marmite. Have you ever eaten at La Marmite?"

"No."

"It's the best restaurant in France. That is, it was. I tried to find it in 1945 but the whole area was blown to bits during the invasion. Waterfront. A very respectable restaurant that the respectable *bourgeois* even brought their wives to, standing smack in the middle of all the whorehouses on the Rue des Galéons.

"I got the boys—a few of them—out of the concentration camp for a couple meals there and got them a bath one Sunday at the Falcon, but I never went back there again and I never will."

"Why not?"

"That's another story."

"Are you telling stories," said Morton, "or are we working together to get at the root of all this?"

"The important thing is that they had to send for Anne again, to come down to Le Havre and get me because I was barricaded in my room in some waterfront fleabag, and I was fighting off the Messerschmitts that were diving through the walls and machine-gunning me. They sewed seams right up and down me and one bullet even hit me smack in the belly-button and went right through. I remember admiring that shot."

"Does that mean anything to you?"

"What?"

"That in *delirium tremens* you were shot in the navel?"

"Not a god damned thing," said Lang. "Will you stop distracting me?" Morton didn't reply.

"I can weep sometimes and sometimes I do when I think of what my poor Annie went through during all that with me in a straitjacket in a hospital screaming for Dolores at the top of my lungs and insisting that the fascists were coming in the windows and out of the woodwork. They *were,* too. They wore green uniforms over their long, worm-like bodies and the Sacred Heart of Jesus was embroidered on their backs. Some of them wore Mary's heart with the seven daggers in it—you know, *Maria de los Dolores.*

"That symbol should be obvious enough, even for you," Lang said. "It was also an image of what was to come. And it came the

third week in January when we heard that Barcelona was on the verge of falling to the fascist offensive.

"I was suddenly well again, or I thought I was. I had even started the play and was making headway with the book. I rented a Citröen and Anne and I drove south to Perpignan and from there to Le Perthus on the border. The refugees were beginning to appear and for the next two weeks we witnessed the *débacle*.

"We saw those people—a quarter of a million of them, Everett—old men and women, young women with small children and babies, and the proud marching columns of the Spanish Republican Army, crossing the border with regimental flags flying and bands playing, every one with his rifle or machine-gun; others with trucks hauling light artillery, a few tanks.

"No prouder people ever marched to disaster with greater *élan*. In orderly fashion the men laid down their arms and *then* began the shame of the Third Republic; then it was that the slogan: *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* should have been scraped off the public buildings of France, not later when Pétain took over in the spirit of his two great loves, Franco and Hitler.

"That was when my heart really broke and it hasn't mended since, and if the fascists have finally made a beach-head in America, in the swinish form of the committee chairman and his secret friends, there's no chance that my heart will ever mend again."

"Much has happened since 1939. You got a good book and a good play out of that tragedy," Dr. Morton said. "Have you forgotten?"

"Not a day. Not an hour. Not a minute."

"Hitler has been destroyed. You contributed to his destruction."

"I did?"

"You were a major in the American army?"

"Ha!"

"Hitler and Mussolini. Also Tojo."

"Le roi est mort!" cried Lang. *"Vive le roi!"*

13

November 27, 1947

Anne was mildly astonished when Zav got home from Everett's office and didn't make himself a drink. She was even more surprised at dinner to find a complete change in her husband or what seemed like a complete change, for he had not demonstrated this side of himself in many months.

He was tender and solicitous. He sat next to her instead of across the table. He had brought a bouquet of American Beauty roses and he kissed her on the mouth instead of on the cheek.

Now she felt wonderfully relaxed; there was no tightness in her belly. It was a source of never-ending wonder to her how little alcohol it took to change him from the pleasant, sweet and somewhat melancholy man she had married in 1935 into the sullen, withdrawn or hysterically gay stranger he so rapidly became.

He saw her smiling and asked the reason. "I was thinking," she said, "how close we are together."

"Are we, Annie?" he said, feeling guilty. "I know I fail you miserably more often than not."

"Well, let's say *I* feel close to you; and sometimes you feel close to me."

"I'll try to make it up to you," he said. Then he laughed. "I know I've been saying that for years but I really mean it every time I say it."

"I know you do, Frank," she said and decided to change the subject. It was too close to her deepest emotions and the unformed solution of their problem.

"Did you see the letters on your desk?"

He nodded.

"There were a few more phone calls, too," she said. "In the last two weeks. I didn't tell you about them before because I thought they'd upset you."

"Tell me."

"Oh, the usual thing. Plus some obscenities." She shuddered suddenly and he was disturbed. "What?" he said. She shook her head. "*Tell* me," he said. She looked at him and laughed.

"One woman said to me, 'We'll parade you down Fifth Avenue with a sign around your neck, reading, I slept with a Jew'."

"Forget it."

She smiled and nodded and said, "What're you planning to do tonight, work on the play or the radio-program?"

"I've really given up the play," he said. "I've got to get it through my head some time or other that neither Max Anderson nor I is Shakespeare, nor is this the sixteenth century."

"That's beside the point."

"I'm going to devote myself to you," he said. "What can I do to please you?"

She wanted to say, You can make love to me; you haven't made love to me in sixteen days, but she could never say a thing like that. So she merely smiled. And Lang, embarrassed by the rush of tenderness he felt for his wife, felt obliged to clown.

"May I amuse you, madame?" he said. "Your whim is my law. Shall I stand on my head in Washington Square? Shall I jump out the window shouting, 'Long Live Annie!' or shall I. . ." here he put two fingers to his lower lip and fingered it rapidly, producing a slapping sound.

She laughed. "Ah!" he shouted. "We are amused." He came to her as she stood up from the table and clasped her around the waist. "Are we amused or are we not amused?"

"We are amused," she said, pressing her body slightly against him. The telephone rang.

"Damn!" he said, releasing her. "I'll take it inside," and he strode rapidly to his study as Anne stood there thinking, what would it be like if some day he said, 'To hell with the telephone! *Let* it ring!'? He had even answered it once when they were making love, lying motionless on her till he had finished the conversation!

When Zav picked up the phone on his desk the voice said, "Flax," and something in the way Bert said it prevented Lang from replying, "Linseed oil."

"How are you, Bert?"

"I'm bushed."

"Sitting in that big armchair too long, eh?"

"Listen, Zav," said Flax. "I have bad news—"

"Don't tell me," said Lang, histrionically. "The program is cancelled!"

"Exactly," said Flax and waited for Lang to speak again. He had to wait a good thirty seconds before Lang was able to reply. Then all he said was, "What're you talking about?"

"I've had to cancel the program, Zav," Flax said. "Don't think I didn't fight for it, but my board of directors—"

"Are you *crazy?*"

"That's what I'm so bushed about," said Flax. "We've been at it all afternoon, hammer and tongs."

"Maybe you'd better start at the beginning."

"There *is* no beginning, Zav," said Flax. "They just came down on me and said, 'No more Lang.' I fought for you. I said it wasn't fair, it wasn't American, there had been no adverse publicity, we hadn't had more than a few crank letters and calls and we get those all the time, but—"

"Look," said Lang. "I'm coming over."

"Don't!" Flax said swiftly. "There's no point in it. I couldn't go over the whole damn thing again with you if my life depended on it, and besides it wouldn't do—"

"What the hell *are* you, anyhow," said Lang, "a god damned coward?"

After a pause, Flax said, "Yes."

"All right, then," said Zav. "I'll put some lead in your pencil for you. Let *me* talk to your lousy board."

"They wouldn't even talk to you on the long distance telephone."

"But *why?*" said Lang, completely frustrated.

"They have it in their head that if the government has something on you, they don't want you advertising our product."

Lang was rapidly growing furious. "Who the fuck said this committee was the government? Are your directors a pack of lunatics? What've they got on me? *Nothing!* I told you that already. I *told—*"

"You're appearing again, I hear."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"Is it true?"

"Yes it's true but how did you find out?"

The phone was silent and Lang, frantic, jiggled the little buttons on the cradle. "Are you *there?*"

"I'm here," said Flax sadly. "I might as well tell you. I've had a visit from the FBI—" Lang was completely silent, so Flax finally went on. "They didn't say anything you could put your finger on, but it's the fact of your involvement and their interest in that involvement that's more important than anything they said."

"I shit on the FBI!" said Lang, howling into the phone, "and I hope to hell they're listening!"

"They are," Flax said in a non-committal voice.

"Did you tell your board about this?"

"What do you think I am, Zav?"

"*Did* you?"

"Two of them had also been visited."

"I want to know what the hell they said!"

"Look, Zav, let's get this straight. I told them—the FBI, too—that I knew nothing derogatory about you, that I had implicit faith that anything they or the committee thought was wrong with you could be explained. You've got to understand *my* position in all this."

"Sure, sure," Zav snarled. "Like the guy in the dirty joke—Lucky Julius—always in the middle."

"You've described it perfectly."

"What you're saying is, you mean that it doesn't mean *anything* to your stinking laxative company that I've been accused of *nothing,* admitted to nothing and have only been questioned in private?"

"If the committee clears you, Zav, you'll be back on the air—"

"Thanks for nothing!" Lang said and hung up so viciously that the phone slid off the desk and fell onto the floor. He let it lie, walked to his closet, took his hat and jammed it on his head, slipped

into his coat and started for the door leading to the living room.

Anne was standing there. "I couldn't help hearing," she said. "What're you going to do?"

"I don't know," he said. "What I *do* know is that somebody's out to do a job on me. This thing hasn't had enough publicity to warrant the phone calls you told me about, the letters, the FBI coming to see me or Flax or anybody. There's something screwy about it."

Absently, he walked past her across the living room and when she said, "Where're you going, Frank?" he didn't turn but stopped dead and said, "Out."

"Where?"

"For a walk."

"Take me with you."

"No," he said. "I'm like Garbo. I want to be alone."

She had reached him by now and taking him by both arms she turned him around to face her. Even though he was so much taller, she had the peculiar feeling that she was looking down into his face, like a mother gazing indulgently at a small boy.

"Frank," she said, "you're letting me down now."

"I'm sorry."

"You're not," she said. "I'm feeling close to you, closer than I've felt in months, and you're miles away."

"That's the nature of the beast."

"Then change it," she said.

He started to turn but she tugged on his arms and he grew suddenly angry, threw off her hands and said, "I *said* I want to go for a walk alone, and when I want to go for a walk alone I want to go for a walk *alone!*"

"Frank, I've got to talk to you."

"Tomorrow."

"There may not be a tomorrow if you won't talk to me now."

He looked at her with mild amusement. "I have news for you," he said, and added, "An expression I picked up in Hollywood. *Es igual.* An expression I picked up in Spain."

"That isn't all you picked up in Spain!" she heard herself crying, and he turned for a moment at the door and shouted over his shoulder, "And that isn't all I picked up in Hollywood, either."

He slammed the door...

Lang knew exactly where he was going when he left University Place but there was a game he liked to play with himself: that he didn't know where he was going, was merely walking and would suddenly find himself at Peggy's place on Morton Street.

Part of the excitement of this game, he realized, came from an itch to find out whether or not Peggy was two-timing him or maybe three, four or five-timing him. He laughed out loud. What a moral sense *I* have! Why the hell shouldn't she two-time me? And where would I come off being jealous or indignant about it?

This game within a game delighted him in a perverse fashion. If she weren't two-timing him, then it could mean that at forty-seven he was as good a lover as she at twenty-eight required. And she was a girl with an enormous appetite.

Walking across Washington Square he recalled again how he had met her the year before, when he had gone to Hollywood to write a screenplay for Columbia. He had been installed in a luxurious office in the writers' building away from the lot itself, and the first day as he was sitting there waiting for the producer to summon him, she had walked in.

A small, dark girl with huge eyes and a spectacular miniature figure poured into impossibly tight slacks and blouse, she had come in wagging a pair of excellent buttocks (callipygous, not steatopygous) and perched herself on the edge of his desk.

"How are you, Mr. L.?" she had said. "I'm Peggy O'Brien. I'm working with you on this masterpiece you're about to perpetrate."

"How are you, Peggy?" he said and she replied, "I'm alive."

It was an understatement. The vitality of the girl was staggering. She could not remain quiet very long. She moved from the desk to the armchair to the couch even when he was dictating story treatment or dialogue to her. She interrupted him whenever she felt like it to say, "That's corny," or "We did that seven times last year," reeling off a list of Columbia films.

She found out rapidly that he liked to take a nap after lunch and she guarded the door, sitting at her desk in the outer office so that the producer would not find him asleep if he were to turn up in the writers' building.

And such is the relationship between a Hollywood writer and his secretary that it did not take two weeks before Lang knew the entire story of her life (from her point of view), and she knew a great deal more about him than he wanted her to know.

She told him of her marriage, now terminated, to a GI who had gone to the Aleutians a month after the ceremony, returned two years later. There *was* no marriage, she said, and even before he was shipped out she had known it. Just one of those things, she said. And with a candor that made him blush, she announced, "I got bored with the endless screwing."

This subject came up again a month after he had started on the job and they had been moved from the writers' building, which

was being redecorated, into a bungalow on the back lot that was actually one of the stars' dressing rooms. Walking now through the streets of the Village, Lang tried to remember whether it was Glenn Ford's or Rita Hayworth's. What difference does it make? he wondered.

It was certainly less a dressing room, even by Hollywood standards, than a complete living unit with kitchen, bedroom and bath, and it was totally isolated. And when the time came for a nap one day, Lang took off his shoes and stretched out on the bed and Peggy came and lay down beside him.

She had seen her ex-GI, she said. He wanted to get her back, but it was no soap. Lang found himself automatically using the pseudo-scientific approach, looking at her as she lay with her small but well-formed breasts pointing at the ceiling, both hands behind her head.

She seemed to be a healthy female, he had said. Oh, she was. Could work all day in the studio and then go jitterbugging all night at the Palladium. Then what was wrong with the guy? he wanted to know. She had shown him a snapshot: a typical football playing type. I told you, she said. Didn't you respond to him at all? Oh, once in awhile, she said, but the whole thing was a crashing bore. He was amused by the British locution and laughed and she turned her dark eyes on him and said, "Maybe it wouldn't be a bore with you."

Now she opened the door of her second-floor apartment when he used the knocker and she said, "Mr. L."

"The same. Am I disturbing you?"

"If you mean, do I have a man hiding under the bed, I don't."

He came in, took off his hat and coat as though he lived there and tossed them aside. He glanced at her. "How come you don't?" he said.

As he dropped into the armchair she said, "I know which side my caviar is buttered on."

"Oh, come off it, Peg."

"I get damned lonesome in this great city of yours," she said, "and I'd like to see the day when I meet somebody besides the stuffy celebrities that turn up at your parties and the guys I see in the coffee pot down the block. They're all squares."

"Nobody ever calls?" he said and she nodded her head and said, "Do you want a drink or do you want a drink?" She didn't wait for an answer but added, "I'll get it."

"It's my intention to get looped tonight," said Lang, "and I'd be delighted if you'd join me in a splash."

"What's eating you now?"

"I have news for you," said Lang. "So many things are eating me that it's a wonder there's anything left of me to eat."

"The committee?"

"They've called me again," he answered and she whirled and looked at him with surprise. "They didn't?"

"Yes, December eighth."

She shook her head, poured the brandy into two huge snifters he had given her as a present and brought one to him. "You sure you haven't had any callers recently? (She shook her head again.) A couple cute looking boys in Brooks Brothers suits, double-breasted, who carry identification badges in their pockets?"

"What do you mean?" she said, knowing very well what he meant.

"They called on *me,*" he said.

"FBI?"

"None other," he said and tossed off the brandy, held the glass out to her. She rose and brought the bottle, put it on the end-table next to his chair.

"Whatever they want," she said, "you tell it to them."

"Why?"

"I told you, didn't I? I used to work for the FBI in L. A. before I got a studio job. They scare me."

"They don't scare me," he said, warming the snifter between his palms.

"They're so damned efficient," she said, "you can't kid around with them, Mr. L."

The phone rang and they looked at each other for a moment. "You want me to answer it?" she finally said and he said, "Why not?"

She picked up the phone, which was on the coffee table in front of the couch and said, "Hello?" listened a moment or so and then said "wrong number" and hung up. Lang smiled behind the glass he was holding to his lips.

She came to him and sat on his lap. "Mr. L." she said and he said, "When will you stop calling me Mr. L?"

"You want I should call you my little man? That's what the girls in the studios usually call their writers. You should hear them when you're not around."

"I'm not your little man," he said, thinking, I'll show the bitch I'm as good as any lover half my age. Amazing, he thought, how much better I am with her than I am with my lawful wedded wife.

She held his hand and took a sip out of his brandy glass, put her ripe lips up to be kissed. He kissed her.

"You know," he said, "if those Brooks Brothers should call on you, you'd better *not* tell them anything they want to know."

"Why not?"

"Did you ever hear of the Mann Act?"

"Sure."

"Should be called the Woman Act," Lang said and gave her a squeeze. He put his glass down and ran one hand under her skirt. "Technically," he said, "they could send me up for a good long stretch if they got the idea that I imported you from Hollywood."

She sat up straight and frowned and said, "Ridiculous."

"What makes you think it's so ridiculous?"

"You mean it's against the law for a writer to hire a secretary?"

"No," he said, "but our relationship is and always has been slightly irregular."

"I don't see why. It's only right that if you take me out of my job in Hollywood and bring me to New York, you should pay my fare."

"Should I also pay your rent, buy your clothes and sleep with you?"

"Zav," she said, getting off his lap, "did they ask questions about me?"

"They did."

"What did you tell them?"

"What you just told me."

She started to pace up and down the room and he sat there trying to figure out whether she *had* been visited, and whether they knew of the relationship and whether *that* was what they wanted after all. He had a sneaking suspicion that it wasn't but how could anybody tell? She stopped in front of him, snatched a pillow from the couch, tossed it at his feet and squatted on it.

"I haven't told a soul *anything* about us," she said and he knew she was frightened and was convinced immediately that she had not seen the FBI.

"Lots of people know I work for you, but that's all."

"Forget it."

"It's been hard," she said, "not getting to know anybody here in New York. I'm *lonesome*. I could have cultivated a dozen of the icky men I've met at your house; plenty of them have made passes at me—"

"Who?"

"Never mind," she said. "But maybe it would be a good idea at that, help to cover up for both of us."

"You do and I'll fan your tail," he said. "You're a good girl and I love you." He put his hand on her dark hair and stroked it.

"Do you?" she said with a quizzical smile.

" 'In my fashion.' That's Ernest Dowson."

"You know," she said, "I feel terribly sorry for Anne."

"Leave her out of it," he said with a frown.

"Listen, Zav," she said, "you tell that committee or the FBI anything they want to know. I'm not kidding, darling. They have ways and means of finding out, anyhow."

"Should I tell 'em about us?"

"No."

"Can't they find that out, too?"

"I'm not talking about that. The worst that can come out of *that* is a scandal and a divorce."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?" he said, suddenly grasping her short hair and pulling her head toward him.

"Stop that," she said. "Stick to the subject. I'm talking about political stuff. I know what I'm talking about. Those Hollywood characters were watched for years before the committee called them up. I worked for one. They had his phone tapped, they listened to every conversation he made from his office or his home, and a girl I knew in plant security told me they had a dossier on him that thick."

"What was he plottin'?" said Lang. "Blow up the studio?"

"I'm not kidding," Peggy said. "They knew every meeting he spoke at, every house he visited, who he saw at lunch off the lot—everything."

"You're not drinking enough," Lang said, splashing brandy into her glass and handing it to her. He realized that her fear of the FBI had infected him somewhat—if he hadn't been afraid of it before—and poured another drink for himself.

"You're not one of *those* characters, are you?" she said.

" 'Course not. But I'm still tryin' t' find out what they did that was so horrendous."

"Nothing," Peggy said. "They had radical ideas, I guess. You know, Negro rights and all that sort of stuff."

"That's radical?"

"They did something about it," she said, "or they tried to. They had petitions and spoke at meetings, wrote pamphlets and collected money. They actively backed the painters' strike. Other people just talked."

"Lincoln did something 'bout it, too."

"Who he?"

"*Abe* Lincoln."

"Oh," she said.

"Forget it," he said and grasped her hair again. "You in the mood?"

She drained her glass and said, "Always."

"You my Minute Woman?"

"That's me. Tell the committee the truth, Zav. What've you got to lose?"

"Drop it!" Lang said. "I'm bored with it." He gazed at her. She seemed slightly blurred, but only pleasantly so.

"You like wha' we do?"

"Yes."

"Ev'rything?"

"Everything."

"You wanna be wild t'night, you li'l bitch?"

"Yes, wild."

"Straight an' level 'r acrobatics?"

"You're the pilot."

"I'll give you a check-ride," he said. "I'll wring you out." He pulled her body between his legs and buried his face in her hair. "D'lores," he murmured.

"I'm Peggy," she said. "Remember?"

After he had used her and she had serviced him, she went into the bathroom announcing that she was going to take a long hot bath and he should go to sleep. He wasn't sleepy. He was drunk. He was somewhat dizzy and he got off the bed and went into the living room where his clothes were thrown all over the floor and automatically started to put them on. No whore I've ever met in the waterfront dives of Singapore, Port Said or the posh joints on the Rue Blondel has such technique. Pfui!

In the middle of dressing, which was difficult, he picked up the telephone book and looked for Blau, Ben. There was a Blau, Benjamin, M. D., but he knew that couldn't possibly be the one. He was annoyed. I wanna talk to that guy, he thought. I gotta find out where he is. He dimly remembered that the Spanish veterans had some sort of organization and looked vaguely for it, but not remembering its name he didn't find it. He suddenly knew he wasn't going to stay all night and hurried dressing.

There was still some brandy in the bottle and he drank from the bottle. It made him feel better. Leave a note, he thought and hunted vainly for a piece of paper and a pencil, then forgot it. He let himself out of the apartment quietly, forgetting his hat.

On the corner there was a bar open and he went in, found the telephone booth and called Morton. When he answered, Lang said, "Francis Lang. Gotta see you. I'm in danger."

"Are you intoxicated?"

"So what?"

"I'll see you tomorrow, Francis, at the regular time."

"You see me t'night. I'll getta cab. Gotta see you. I tol' you I'm 'n

danger," he said, suddenly starting to sob into the mouthpiece. "Ev'rett, don' lemme down. I *gotta* see you. I's urgen'."

"What kind of danger are you in?"

"I dunno. *Bad.* Bad, bad. *Please.* I'm comin'. . . ." He couldn't say any more; he was suddenly overcome by emotion; he knew he had to see Everett or something dreadful would happen.

"Come ahead," said Morton after a pause. . .

When Peggy found Zav gone she looked for a note. He had done this sort of thing before; he had even come back later. Noticing the hat on the chair, she figured he would be back, but it would take at least half an hour. The bottle was empty. He had gone for another.

She leaned out the window to see if he was in the street, then rapidly closed it. It was cold. She strode to the phone, dialed a number and waited. When it answered, she said swiftly:

"How many times have I told you I call *you,* not you call *me?* See if you can't get it through your head. My job's involved in this. Sometimes the little man likes to work here and he doesn't like to be interrupted."

She listened, laughed in a low, seductive tone and said, "Don't be ridiculous, honey. How could you be jealous of an old men?"

14

November 30, 1947

The following Sunday, near the end of his broadcast, Martin Mitchell said: "Fireworks will bust loose here when the Un-American Activities Committee opens hearings on December tenth.

"A certain prominent—and I mean prominent—scribbler, who's been questioned before in private, will appear on the eighth, in secret session again.

"Boy *oh boy,* what the committee knows about *him* would fill a book he could have written himself. In fact, he *did* write it. His middle initial's X. I say, his middle initial is X."

Lang wanted to snap the thing off but Anne, who was sitting in the study with him, said, "Wait. I want to hear what they've substituted for *you.*" She smiled and he gave her a bitter smile in return. And when Mitchell had finished the station announcer came on and said:

"The program usually heard at this time will not be broadcast owing to the illness of Francis Lang, the commentator. A program of dinner music will be heard instead. We take you now—"

"Well, I'll be damned," said Lang, snapping the switch.

"I knew that was going to happen, Frank," she said, taking his hand, "and I wanted you to hear it before I told you."

"Told me what?"

"Bert Flax is coming to dinner."

"What for?"

"Because he wants to help you."

"No, thanks, Annie. I don't need his help."

"But Frank, he hasn't announced cancellation of the program; he wants you back. He told me so himself." Lang felt his body physically relax.

Anne was pleased with him. He hadn't had a drink since Thursday and he had announced on Friday afternoon when he came home with a new hat that he was never going back to Dr. Morton.

"He's done me as much good as he can," he said. "I don't need him any more." Lang hadn't elaborated on the statement nor had he explained where he had gone beyond saying that he had got stiff and spent the night in a Turkish bath.

He had apologized for not calling her and for quarreling when there was no reason to quarrel. He had begged her pardon and his contrition seemed so real that she had deliberately put out of mind her very real suspicion of where he had been that night.

Now he was saying, "As a matter of fact, I'm glad Flax is coming. I wanted to go to his house that night but he said no. If we're going to wind this business up, we might as well wind it up in a business-like manner."

"I don't think you want to wind it up, Frank."

"Don't you?" he said. "I've notified my agent that I'm available to any sponsor looking for a pundit, and he gave me very encouraging reasons to believe it won't take any time at all to find one."

When Flax arrived he was accompanied by a cadaverous man who looked more like an undertaker than the attorney Bert introduced him to: James V. Weaver.

"Can't you even eat dinner without your mouthpiece?" Lang joked. "I'm not going to sue you. I've got another sucker on the string."

"He's not *my* lawyer tonight," said Bert with a smile, and when he smiled his normally round face broke into several unrelated pieces. "He's *your* lawyer."

Weaver spoke and his voice was as lugubrious as his appearance. "Bert felt that if you're testifying before the committee again, you ought to be represented by counsel."

"No disrespect to you, counsellor," Lang said as the maid served cocktails, "but I don't need a lawyer. I haven't committed any crimes."

"Not drinking?" said Bert with surprise and Anne could have kicked him.

"I'm drying out," said Lang and turned his attention to Weaver, who smiled slightly and said, "Even the innocent are represented by counsel, Mr. Lang."

"Bert's right," said Anne and Zav looked at her and said, "Another county heard from."

"No," she said indignantly, "you *know* what kind of a committee this is. You said so yourself. They're out to trap people for their own purposes. They're not interested in the truth."

"I have no intention of walking into their trap. There isn't a damned thing they can do to me."

"How do you mean that?" said Flax.

"With all due *im*modesty," Lang replied, "I have something of a reputation in this country—*and* abroad—and if Flaxlax doesn't want me to sell its sterling product, maybe *Ex*-Lax or even Carters' Little Liver Pills will."

"Flaxlax wants you," said Bert with a frown.

"I'm not sure I want *it,*" said Lang. "It tastes like hell."

"Mr. Lang," said Weaver, with his hands clasped as though he were praying, "I would like to make my position clear. I wouldn't want you to think I'm intruding."

"Not at all," said Zav, delighted by the man, "It's a pleasure."

"These committees are legal entities set up by the Congress to make inquiries into various fields for the purpose of initiating legislation in the Congress."

"Precisely," said Lang, "and since they can't legislate in the field of ideas—unless they want to violate the Constitution—then I'm entitled to spit in their eye as I did the first time I appeared."

"Great," said Flax, frowning into his martini, "but not very practical. Look what happened to those Hollywood people."

"*You* look," said Lang, turning to Bert. "I'm not in the same spot as those birds. We have a long tradition in this country of free speech. We have *such* a long tradition and so powerful a tradition that it's perfectly within my rights to stand up on a soapbox in Union Square and advocate that all congressmen who are dominated by their local business men should be shot at sunrise."

"Just a moment," said Weaver.

"Sure you can," said Flax. "All they could do is put you in the booby-hatch." He turned to Anne. "What do you think, honey?"

"Francis is a difficult man," she said with an indulgent smile.

"He doesn't like to be told what to do and if you try to tell him, he's just as likely to do the opposite, out of spite."

"Great," said Flax. "My six-year-old does the same thing."

"*Not* spite," said Lang, wincing. "Principle. I don't suppose in the laxative business you've ever heard of such a thing."

"My business is built on principle," said Flax. "Our product is licensed under the Pure Food and Drug Act and, unlike some others I could mention, it has never been cited by the FTC for putting out false claims about what it can do."

"It does it all right," said Weaver, deadpan.

"Annie hit it right on the head," said Lang. "I don't like to be pushed around and neither does any American worth his salt."

"It's not a question of being pushed around, Mr. Lang," said Weaver. "It's a question of expediency."

"To hell with expediency," said Zav as the maid appeared in the doorway. "Shall we put on the nose-bag?"

As they went in to dinner, Lang continued. "If Flaxlax says, No Lang, then Lang says he will accept another sponsor—at a raise."

They sat at table and were silent while the maid served the soup. Then, as she left the room, Flax said, "I've gotta talk turkey to you, Zav."

"No turkey," said Lang. "We're having chateaubriand and *pommes soufflés.*"

"OK," said Bert. "It's no skin off my nose if you give up seven hundred and fifty bucks a week for those fifteen minutes every Sunday night. In fact, it's money in my pocket."

"Score one for you," said Lang.

"But I object when you say I'm not a man of principle. I am. I believe you have a right to be on the air. What's more, I believe you have an obligation to be on the air. You're the only intelligent *and* educated commentator we have, aside from Elmer Davis."

"*Gracias, señor,* for the second billing."

Bert looked at Anne and said, "Zav thinks he can get another sponsor. I can tell you, Anne, he can't. I have wide contacts in the industry. There isn't a decent account that would have him now."

"Is that so?" said Lang belligerently.

"That's so."

"That's not what my agent says."

"He's earning his ten percent," said Bert, "and I think the whole thing stinks. I'm as much against inquisition or intimidation as any man. But facts are facts."

"You mean, facts are stubborn things," said Lang.

"That's exactly what I mean."

"Careful," said Lang with tongue in cheek. "That's a quotation from Vladimir Ilich Lenin."

"Is that so?" said Flax, thrown off stride.

"You mentioned the Constitution, sir," said Weaver, praying over his soup. "Another quotation—from a more respectable source—might be in point. Justice Hughes. He said the Constitution is what the judges say it is."

"Right," said Lang, "and in the Barsky case and the Hollywood case, if those people are ever convicted, the Supreme Court's going to slap this committee six ways from Sunday."

"You may be right," said Weaver, "but I wouldn't count on it."

"Neither would I," said Anne suddenly. She addressed the lawyer and Bert Flax. "But Frank has got to do what he thinks is right. If he feels he has to defy the committee, he'll do it. He's that kind of man."

Lang said, "If you were sitting next to me, madame, instead of this laxative peddler, I'd kiss your hand. But I'll be damned if I'll kiss his ass!"

"Frank!" she said and Weaver frowned.

"Zav," said Flax, "we're off the point. And with all due respect to Jim here, I think we should lay off the legal angles. I'm a business man."

"I have news for you," said Zav. "I'm one myself."

"You're an artist. I'm concerned about the following: One, these are politicians we're dealing with. I know the breed. They're not interested in the law either. They're interested in votes, publicity, feathering their own nests, and in this Red issue they've got hold of something that can produce both—"

"Bert's right," said the lawyer. "You have to consider the public relations angle."

"You're a famous man, Zav," said Bert, "but you live on public opinion whether you like or not. It's what puts steak on your table. Unless you come out of this thing with a clean slate, you're a dead duck. I *know*. You won't get on any program, sponsored or sustaining. You won't get a play produced. You won't get a book printed and there isn't a newspaper in the country that would hire you for a copy boy. Those are facts."

"The Reds are getting very unpopular in this country," said Weaver, still praying over the soup.

"I beg your pardon?" said Lang.

"I beg *your* pardon," said Weaver, looking up. "I'm not the slightest interested in your political opinions. I'm only concerned with your rights under the law."

"Zav's no Red," said Bert Flax, his rosy face a shade or so paler.

"I'm sure he's not."

"He may have associated with some peculiar people in the past," Flax went on with a laugh, "when he was in Spain, I guess; but he's a Roosevelt Democrat, the poor dope, and Roosevelt's dead."

"Let's get this straight, my friends," said Lang. "I'm not going to require the services of Mr. Weaver." Here he bowed to the lawyer. "And I don't need Bert's advice. Though I respect both of you and your obvious interest in my welfare."

"Bert didn't mean—" said Anne, but Lang went right on.

"I have some dignity and I have some self-respect. I intend to maintain them. Before I would grovel for these cheap characters—for Christ sake!" he cried suddenly, "have you ever *listened* to them on the Hill? Have you ever heard them in debate? My God, if anybody wanted to disillusion the whole damned population with the democratic process, all he'd have to do is wire the House and Senate for sound and put them on the air. In one week there'd be a revolution!"

Flax contemplated the soup and said quietly, "Jim and I were listening to the radio in the car tonight." He looked up. "What do you suppose Mitchell meant?"

"I never listen to him," said Lang. "What did he say?" Anne looked at him and he smiled at her. She smiled faintly.

"He identified you—by your middle initial—said you were appearing again before the committee and—I think I'm quoting right—'what the committee doesn't know about *him* would fill a book.' Is that right, Jim?" Bert said, turning to Weaver.

"That's exactly right."

"If you listen to these gent's room journalists," said Lang, "you'll wake up some morning and find that you'll have to patronize your own product."

"No kidding, Zav," said Bert, and his face was anguished. "What was he driving at?"

"How the hell should *I* know?" said Lang. "He probably meant that I loved my mother, hated my father, take dope, am a hopeless lush, beat my wife and maintain a stable of mistresses."

There was an uncomfortable pause and Flax noticed that Anne's eyes were filled with tears.

15

SUBVERSIVE AND UNAMERICAN PROPAGANDA ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED STATES

December 8, 1947

Executive Session

—I will accept the transcript as read.

—You're satisfied, Mr. Lang, that what the reporter has just read is correct, as to your testimony before this committee on November 7?

—It sounds right.

—Now, Mr. Lang, you will recall that we expressed some dissatisfaction last time with your testimony. In fact, I had to admonish you on several occasions about your attitude, which I—which several of the committee members felt was bordering on the contemptuous.

—I believe I apologized for that, Mr. Chairman.

—Now we would like to know, Mr. Lang, since a month has passed, whether you feel you would like to add to your testimony, or amplify it, modify it in any way.

—I have nothing to add.

—You're satisfied you told the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God.

—(After a pause). If you have any questions, Mr. Congressman, perhaps you'd better ask them. You called me here.

—We intend to do that, sir. Mr. Investigator, you may proceed.

—Mr. Lang, you are not represented by an attorney?

—No, sir.

—You know you're entitled under the rules of this committee to have counsel advise you as to your rights before this committee.

—(Witness is silent.)

—I take it, then, you don't feel the need of being represented by counsel.

—I have nothing to conceal.

—Mr. Lang, you testified on November 7 that you are not and never were a member of the Commonist Party. We just read that.

—You read it.

—You testified to that.

—I did.

—As a matter of fact, Mr. Lang, is it not true that you joined

the Commonist Party in 1939, shortly after you had returned from Spain?

—(Witness is silent.)

—Will you answer the question, Mr. Lang?

—I'll answer it.

—You can say yes, or no, or if you don't care to answer, just say so.

—Thank you. (After a pause.) It is a fact that I joined the Communist Party in 1939. I am no longer a member.

—You're no longer a member?

—That's correct.

—When did you cease—when did you resign from your membership?

—In 1939.

—You joined and you resigned—or is it dropped out—in the same year?

—I'd like to explain this if I may.

—Just a moment, please.

—Mr. Lang, you're aware, of course, that on November 7 you stated under oath that you had never been a member of the Commonist Party...

—I...

—Just a moment, please. Mr. Investigator, would you please read that testimony...

—No need to. I just heard it read. I accepted it.

—I am interested in finding out, Mr. Lang, why a month ago you said you were not and had never been a Commonist, and now you say you were, but aren't.

—I'm interested in explaining that, sir. I asked to explain it.

—Please do.

—I joined the Communist Party, briefly, in 1939, under the stress of emotion and in the mistaken conviction that it held the solution of problems that deeply concerned me. I was not alone in holding that conviction, nor in joining.

—And you dropped out the same year.

—That's right.

—Did you lose the emotion or the conviction, or did you find out that the Commonists didn't have the solution to your problems?

—The sarcasm is uncalled for, Mr. Congressman. I'm trying to give an honest answer to...

—I remind you, sir, that a month ago you committed perjury before this committee, and now you come before us and give opposite answers and ask us to believe you. What made you change your mind?

—Change my mind?

—About answering this particular question.

—I'm telling the truth. It is a truthful reply.

—That's not a responsive answer. I asked you why you said No a month ago and coupled your answer with obvious contempt, and now you answer yes.

—I changed my mind.

—Like you did in 1939?

—No.

—How did you come to change your mind?

—I don't think the answer to that question would be revelant.

—It may not seem revelant to you, sir, but we decide—the committee decides—what questions are revelant and what are not.

—Let's leave it at that, sir. I changed my mind. I did not tell the truth a month ago. I'm telling it today. That should be enough.

—Mr. Lang, were you a Commonist Party member when you were in the US Army in 1941-1945?

—I told you I dropped out in 1939. It was a question of very swift disenchantment, you might say, like the way you feel after a binge. If I may use an image—a writer works with images—I was drunk when I joined. I dropped out after the hangover had worn off.

—You were not a Commonist in the Army.

—I answered that.

—You held the rank of Major.

—I did. Assimilated rank.

—Did you apply for the commission or was it offered to you?

—It was offered. I don't remember applying. I enlisted.

—You enlisted and the commission was offered to you?

—That's right.

—Who offered it?

—It came through regular channels.

—Did you have any reason to believe that the late President Roosevelt had anything to do with your being offered the commission?

—Ridiculous!

—Why is it ridiculous?

—You're trying to smear the name and reputation of a very great President, who is dead and cannot answer your allegations. I resent deeply...

—(Pounding gavel.) That will be enough, sir. You were a friend of Mr. Roosevelt?

—He honored me with his friendship, yes.

—You're reasonably certain he had no hand in seeing that a man with your convictions and associations obtained a majority in the American Army, over the heads of many worthier men?

—That question is loaded three or four ways, but the answer is yes, I'm certain.

—How can you be certain?

—The President, it might occur to you, had a few minor things to keep him occupied at the time, aside from procuring commissions for people he knew.

—Mr. Lang, in the Army you were attached to General Eisenhower's headquarters as a public relations expert, is that right?

—Public relations, yes. I don't know about the expert.

—You worked out of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces in Paris?

—I did.

—Now, in Spain, Mr. Lang, where you were a correspondent for the American wire services, did you act as an espionage agent?

—I beg your pardon, sir.

—I said, were you an espionage agent for anyone while you were in Spain?

—The implication is absurd. (After a pause.) I was occasionally asked to write reports for officials of the Spanish Republican government, which I was glad to do.

—What sort of reports?

—Reports on what I had seen, observed, action at the front, morale of troops, rearguard activities.

—Did you also make a report on a Commonist Party meeting in Madrid—a closed meeting—in May 1938?

—(After a pause.) You must have the report in your dossier, Mr. Chairman.

—Whether we do or do not, Mr. Lang, did you make such a report?

—Yes.

—Mr. Witness, for a man who has sworn to identical opposite things in the space of a single month, you seem to me remarkably sarcastic.

—I'm sorry you feel that way, Mr. Congressman.

—I have no idea whether you're telling the truth now when you're under oath when you said...

—I am telling the truth.

—...when you said a month ago the opposite, I mean said the opposite a month ago. Nor do I understand why you have changed your testimony or why you expect us to believe, today, that you aren't a Commonist.

—There are lots of things about this inquiry, sir, that I don't understand myself. I don't understand why I'm here or why you're interested in me, my opinions or my personal history. So if you're

confused, I hope you won't take it amiss if I say I'm also confused.

—We'll try to straighten you out, Mr. Lang. We're interested in you because you're an important man, famous writer, and you have been places and done things and been in a position to influence the thinking of millions of Americans.

—You flatter me. But even if that were true, is that wrong or sinful or un-American, sir?

—It might be, in view of the fact that you now admit you are a Commonist when you...

—I am not a Communist, sir.

—Were a Commonist. Are you now, would you now describe yourself as an enemy of Commonism?

—I would.

—Since 1939?

—Since 1939.

—Have you ever written any articles against Commonism?

—No.

—Written any books or plays?

—Not on that subject.

—Broadcast on your radio program, attacking the revolutionary international Commonist movement?

—No, sir.

—How do you account for that, sir, if you are as you say, an enemy of that movement?

—I never had occasion to comment on the subject.

—Do you expect us to believe that a man who is an enemy of the Commonist Party and what it stands for—the violent overthrow of the American form of government—would remain silent on the subject or have no occasion to comment on it for—let's see—eight years?

—I expect you to believe it. As a matter of fact, in the short time I was involved in the movement, I never saw anything revolutionary about it. Dull, yes. Stupid, certainly. Uninspired and wrongheaded, of course. It was—and still is, as far as I know—an open, legal political party, is it not?

—Did you attend open meetings?

—Open meetings, also meetings at which many non-communists were present.

—In public halls or private homes?

—Both.

—And you saw nothing revolutionary in this party which openly advocates the overthrow of all existing American institutions?

—I'd rather not get into a philosophical argument with you, Mr.

Congressman, but apparently my understanding of the party and your understanding of it are not the same.

—Apparently. Mr. Lang, going back to Spain again, how did you get into this closed Commonist meeting in Madrid? Just a moment —that was where you met the Commonist woman you talked about last time, isn't it, Mrs. Iburry...

—Ibarrúri. That is where I met her. To answer your first question, I was invited.

—You were not a Commonist at the time?

—No, sir.

—You were sympathetic?

—Yes and no. More no than yes.

—More no than yes. Yet you were invited to attend this secret meeting of the top Red leaders of Spain?

—It was not a secret meeting.

—Who invited you?

—A young woman who is now dead.

—What was her name?

—It would mean nothing to you, sir. She was a young Spanish woman.

—Was her name, as a matter of fact, not Dolores Munoze?

—(After a pause) Muñoz.

— Where is she now, did you say?

—She was killed in an air-raid on Barcelona on August 19, 1938.

—Mr. Lang, with your "different" understanding of the Commonist Party than we have, why do you describe yourself as an enemy of the Party?

—(After a pause) Well, perhaps I'm not an active enemy. But I'm certainly not sympathetic to it.

—You say now you're not an enemy. A moment or so ago you said you were. Which is it this time?

—I dislike intensely the inference that I am a liar, sir.

—You're not here to express your sentiments or lecture this committee, sir, and I...

—I'm here. You brought me here. I'll express my sentiments if I please, and I...

—(Pounding gavel) Just a moment, sir. I don't think we'll take too much more of your time, but I want to get a few things straight. On your first appearance a month ago you swore under oath that you were not and never had been a member of the Party. Today you swear you were but no longer are. Today you swear you are an enemy of the Party and two minutes later you swear you are not. Today you swear you were not an espionage agent in Spain but provide evidence that you were. As a matter of fact, sir... I'll rephrase that.

Did you not say you wrote intelligence reports for the Red government of Spain itself?

—I have said before that there *was* no Red government of Spain, and I reiterate it. I also wrote reports—on request—for the American chargé d'affaires and the American military attaché, as all American foreign correspondents do on request.

—Did you write a report for an American government official on the Commonist meeting in Madrid you described before?

—I did.

—It wasn't a carbon copy of the one you sent to the Red government of Spain?

—It was not. That should put me on the side of the angels, shouldn't it?

—I didn't get that.

—Let it go.

—Mr. Lang, when you wrote these reports for the Red government, did you get paid?

—I did not.

—You did it for love?

—I resent the implication.

—When you were attached to SHAEF under General Eisenhower, did you write about American troop actions in Europe?

—Certainly.

—You had access to front-line positions and classified material?

—Very little of it. And very far from the front.

—Did you ever send any of this material to the Commonist Party or Commonist contacts you had in Europe or the United States?

—I said before I had not been a member of the party since 1939.

—That doesn't answer the question, Mr. Chairman.

—I did not.

—Mr. Chairman, at this point I would like to read, for the record, an excerpt from an article by the witness dated Somewhere in Germany, March 25, 1945.

—Proceed.

—This was apparently written for publication either in the Army publication *Stars and Stripes* for the wire-service pool that operated out of SHAEF at that time. It was not published.

(Reading): "Somewhere in Germany, March 25, 1945: By Francis X. Lang, Major AUS (SHAEF): Meet Ben Blau, an American hero. One of many thousands. But—fortunately for you, and for me—a man I met seven years ago in a different front-line dressing station, in a different war, in a different country.

"That time Ben wasn't wounded, but he had come in from the firing lines with a badly wounded comrade, who died in his arms.

The war was in Spain. Ben was an American volunteer in the Lincoln Battalion of the famous International Brigades. . ."

The account goes on to describe some sort of action in which this man, a sergeant named Blau, was engaged in Germany, and then we have this passage:

"Blau's heroism on this front against the Nazis is of a piece with his heroism in Spain against the Spanish and Italian fascists and the Nazis who overthrew the Spanish Republic for their Führer, Adolf Hitler.

"The guns firing on Blau in Spain were the same guns that fired on him here—perhaps somewhat improved by research and experience on the Iberian Peninsula. The very gunners might have been the same, and certainly Blau was the same man I met on Hill 666 in the Sierra Pandóls in Catalonia on that memorable August day seven years ago.

"His burning hatred of Nazism, of fascism, is basic to his American heroism and stems from his Communist convictions and understanding of what the Nazi-Fascist Axis means to the world today. . ."

—Mr. Lang, do you have anything you would like to say about this piece of writing, which the Army censored so it did not appear in print?

—I have nothing to say, except to add this much. Blau was an authentic hero. You might also read into the record the account of what he did. He was decorated and given a field promotion to the rank of first lieutenant. He was decorated by the general commanding his Division. Those are facts. I see nothing to be ashamed of in either the facts or my description of them.

—Your admiration of Blau as a Commonist—in 1945—that doesn't strike you as inconsistent with your sworn statement today that you left the Commonist Party in 1939 and have not been sympathetic to it since?

—The only inconsistency might arise from the fact that I could have been drunk when I wrote it.

—You're being facetious?

—No. I have frequently been drunk, sir. Haven't you?

—Mr. Lang, I have taken—the committee has taken as much of your impertinence as it will permit. You're in grave danger here of perjury, or at the very least, contempt. This committee, contrary to what the Commonists say about it, does not persecute people, is not interested in giving you a bad time. It is asking your cooperation. Now, you've sworn several times now that you're telling the truth. If you're telling the truth, this committee will cooperate with you. This Blau, isn't it true, is the man who recruited you into the Commonist Party, didn't he?

—He did not.

—Who did?

—Nobody. I recruited myself.

—In the same year, you resigned?

—Dropped out. At the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact.

—You did not know Blau in the party?

—I knew he was a Communist. He told me so in 1939.

—Did you sponsor a book this Blau wrote in 1939?

—I advised my publisher to print it. It was a good book.

—Who else did you know as a Commonist?

—In Spain I knew Dolores Ibarrúri, the young woman Dolores Muñoz, who is dead, and I met Joe North, Georges Soria—these last were correspondents for party newspapers—Earl Browder, Robert Minor, Harry Pollitt of England, Jesús Hernández, who occupied a post in the Spanish Government—Minister of Education I believe, at the time—General Cordón, General Walter, Lieutenant-Colonel Modesto.

—Mr. Lang, these are all well known, open Commonists. This committee would like to know the names of American Commonists you met in Spain or here after you joined the party in 1939.

—I should dislike to name people who may or may not still be party members.

—Your likes and dislikes or mine, sir, are not very important when the security of our country is at stake.

—(Witness is silent.)

—This is an executive session, Mr. Lang. Your testimony here in any event is privileged. You cannot be sued for libel and your testimony need not be made public. The testimony in public session is, of course, on the public record.

—I hope you're not threatening me, sir...

—Threatening you?

—With appearance in public hearings.

—There is no need for you to appear in open session if you're willing to give this committee, this committee of your government, the benefit of your experience and wide knowledge of this evil movement.

—My experience, as I have testified, sir, is extremely limited.

—I think you underestimate yourself, Mr. Lang. You're a trained observer of men and events. You're a keen judge of character...

—You flatter me.

—But you seem to be remarkably naive, sir, if I may be so bold in speaking to a world-famous author. I'm sure what you have observed —the sort of sharp observation you were asked to put to use by the American authorities in Spain and in our Army in Europe

during World War II—I'm certain, sir, that you will recall many things that will be useful to this committee of your government.

—I don't relish the role of the informer.

—That is a word the Commonists use, Mr. Lang, to discredit patriotic Americans. If you will look up the definition in the dictionary you will find that it refers to a person who aids the forces of law and order in apprehending criminals. You would be performing a service to your country just as you did with such distinction in World War II. We have reports of your conduct and your receipt of the Order of Merit...

—Thank you.

—You are certainly concerned—as a man who has made so conspicuous a success in your chosen field of endeavor, a man who came up from extreme poverty to recognition and security—with maintaining that American way of life that made your success possible, aren't you?

—Frankly, I am. I've never enjoyed roughing it. I didn't like it during my childhood or adolescence and I haven't liked it since.

—Shall we proceed, gentlemen, or would you like to take a recess now and hear Mr. Lang after lunch?

—I could use a drink, Mr. Chairman. Brandy, preferably.

2. The Court

". . . The very purpose of the First Amendment is to foreclose public authority from assuming a guardianship of the public mind through regulating the press, speech or religion. In this field every person must be his own watchman for truth, because the forefathers did not trust any government to separate the true from the false for us."

Thomas v. Collins, 323 U.S. 516, 545

1

December 3-4, 1938

Once they had crossed the border and beginning precisely at that moment, Ben found it more and more impossible to believe that he had come out of it alive. As they rode through France in the train it became almost a morbid obsession and he tried several times to shake it off but it kept coming back, insinuating itself into whatever his mind was thinking of at the moment, whatever conversation he was holding, whatever portion of the French December landscape, barren and cold, he was looking at.

He remembered Clem Elliman's remark to Joe Faber that day on the hillside near Tortosa, and he thought of Joe, buried on the crest of the Sierra Pandóls in the shallow soil with nothing to mark his grave. Joe was a Communist, Ben recalled.

Sour he had sometime been, bitter he had been. He often kidded himself, saying he was going to change his name to Joe Bitter, as Gorky had changed his name from Peshkov. Bitter or not, he was a fine writer and Ben could remember whole passages of Joe's journal, which Joe had read to him during rest periods. The movement needed writers. Why abandon the field to the enemy?

That thought brought him back to the moment. After they had crossed the border at Bourg-Madam, tasted the first butter they had eaten in almost two years and gorged till they were half sick on chocolate bars, they had been placed on what was, in effect, a sealed train, with Gardes Mobiles posted on every platform, and started toward Paris.

Busch and Blau, being officers, rated a compartment with faded red plush seats, on which they luxuriated that afternoon and night, alternately sleeping and waking and talking like mad about what had happened and what was going to happen.

The government of the French Republic did not relish the passage through its landscape of the first contingent of returning American volunteers, and this fact was one source of conversation. They talked of Paris, now that they knew they couldn't visit it but were being rushed straight through to Le Havre to be escorted onto the luxury liner *Normandie* (third class) and sent home.

They talked of Joe Faber, whose anonymous grave at least couldn't be defiled by the fascists now that they had retaken the entire sector and driven the Republican Army back across the Ebro.

That had happened about a month and a half after all the Internationals were withdrawn and were waiting in Ripoll, near the border, for the League of Nations commission to come and count them and send them into France. And for Ben that retreat had marked the beginning of the end. (Abandon the field to the enemy, he thought.)

It was a fact none of them ever admitted, even to themselves. It was a fact they did not even like to contemplate, let alone accept. So much blood had been spilled, so much suffering endured, so much heroism displayed, so much sacrifice cheerfully accepted that final defeat was totally unacceptable to the mind.

Yet there were straws to point the way the wind was blowing. There was much more than that. There was the seizure of Czechoslovakia by Hitler after the obscene conference in Munich. With that off Franco's mind, it was possible for him—with Nazi aid—to step up his offensive, and the Ebro sector had collapsed.

"What do you think'll happen, Ed?" said Ben.

"We'll get home just in time to be drafted into the American army," Busch replied.

They both laughed and drank some of the Courvoisier they had bought in Bourg-Madam. They talked about Puigcerda, the town on the Spanish border where they had caught their last glimpse of the people they had come to defend. The men, women and children who had come to the train to see them pass through were frankly weeping; in broad daylight. Just as they had wept on the Diagonal in Barcelona during that last parade, with the *Chatos* and the *Moscas* diving almost to street-level, dropping leaflets in Catalan that read: *Espanya assolirà la seva victòria, que serà també la vostra! Espanya dirà al mon el que és la solidaritat entre els homes!*

They spoke of how the people had broken the police lines to run into the broad avenue, crying and embracing them, saying, we will never forget what you have done for us! Come back when we have won the war! Heroes of the International Brigades, go in peace and love! And that speech *La Pasionaria* had made! Christ, what a speech!

Marching they had wept with the people and sitting in the train they had wept again, remembering. Puigcerda! The town had been bombed an hour after their train went through the international tunnel. They had heard the crunch of air-bombs, sitting in the station restaurant in Bourg-Madam, and looked at one another.

"They were looking for *us*," Busch had said and Herbert Mat-

thews of the *New York Times*, who had driven up to see them off and file his story, had said nervously, "I hope they won't still be looking for you when I drive back down."

Spain will achieve her victory, which will be your victory as well! Spain will tell the world what solidarity among men really is!

That night in the train Busch, Blau and a couple of the other guys got tight on the brandy and sang every song they had learned from the Spanish Republican *Himno de Riego* through the British Battalion's scabrous *Ball of Kerrimuir*. Lubricated by an additional bottle a friendly Garde Mobile had bought for them during the night, Ben unleashed a pleasant enough tenor and sang.

Dawn found the compartment a shambles with the empty bottles rolling from side to side as though they were on a ship and Busch sleeping with his big head in Ben's lap while Ben stared red-eyed at the revolving landscape and felt his beard growing.

It was the time of day when his blood temperature was at its lowest and he was gloomy and depressed. He thought of Joe again and made a note in his mind to go down to Philadelphia and call on that girl he had written to just after Joe was killed. Nellie Pindyck.

Not enough to send her a correct, military letter, saying: "I regret to inform you that *sargento-ayudante* Joseph Faber died of his wounds today in heroic action against the fascists." A personal visit was indicated. Christ, Ben thought, how Joe loved that girl!

Ed Busch woke up and said gruffly, "What the hell am I doing with my head in *your* lap?"

"How should I know?" said Ben. "Maybe you dreamed I was somebody else."

Busch grunted and sat up and scratched his head and Ben heard himself saying, "I got the impression in Spain that you didn't think much of me, Ed." (Good Christ! he thought, I sound just like Lang!)

"To the contrary," said Busch, "for a writer you did a pretty good job."

Pellegrini came into the compartment and stared at them.

"Why you dirty anti-intellectual bastard," said Ben and Busch laughed.

"What goes on with the brass?" said Pellegrini.

"Nothing important," said Busch, getting up. "I'm going to the head. Where is it?" Pellegrini jerked one thumb over his shoulder and Busch said *Hasta luego* and left.

Tony looked around and said, "Nice work if you can get it." He stroked one of the seats. "You should of slept with the proletariat—in third class. I was in the baggage rack." He sat down. "Red plush," he said. "My favorite color."

They were silent for a few moments and then Ben said, "Tony, you're a Communist, aren't you?"

"Of course."

"Why, of course?" said Ben, somewhat annoyed.

"Why not, of course?" said Tony, belligerently. "What would you like me to be?"

Ben didn't answer directly. Instead, he said, "I'm thinking of joining myself."

"Why?" said Tony and Ben looked at him. "Because," he said.

"That's a hell of a reason." Tony, who liked to play the clown, was suddenly very serious.

"Joe was a member. You're a member. You're men I admire and respect."

"That's a worse reason, comrade."

"It's not the only reason," said Ben. "It was plain as the nose on your face—and that's plain enough—that they're the most effective force in Spain. About the most effective force anywhere in the world."

"Force for what?" said Pellegrini.

"For what I've been thinking for a long time I believe in." He looked at Tony. "Will you recommend me?"

"I'll think about it," Pellegrini grinned. "Why not look me up in New York, if you still feel the same way?"

The train slowed down in the Paris yards and began a wide circle around the city. Despite the broad understanding of Spain that existed in France, the people had not been able to force their government to let the veterans get off and attend a meeting. The Daladier government was apparently afraid it might be overthrown by a hundred and fifty international "Communist gangsters"!

They laughed about this with Bert Johnson, the Paris representative of the Friends of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, when he came aboard in the yards with bales of overcoats donated by the French trade unions.

The men were amused by these European coats, but at least they covered up the odd-looking suits they had been issued in Ripoll the night before they left. And Ben felt it was a heartening symbol of the esteem in which they were held by the French workers, who had lost thousands of their best sons at Madrid in the winter of 1936-1937.

Individual representatives of those people had been seen in fields and at railroad stations all along the right of way, lifting their arms and clenched fists in the Popular Front salute. How they knew who was aboard the train or when it was due to pass, none of the returning veterans could figure out.

The train roared on toward Le Havre and they read the mail

Johnson had distributed, mail that had come to Paris and been held ever since Negrin spoke before the League of Nations announcing the withdrawal. They chewed over the news Bert had brought of the international situation, which was rapidly moving toward catastrophe in Europe. They chuckled over Bert's jokes and the bawling out he had given some of the men for not writing home often enough.

At Le Havre it was momentarily just like being in the Brigade all over again. Orders came for immediate action, then were countermanded ten minutes later. They waited. And they were annoyed, for Johnson had told them what to expect; that there was a general strike on, and the sailing might be held up after all.

They were not surprised, therefore, to be met at the station by a large contingent of police and a convoy of buses, and with their paper suitcases and bundles, they were prodded into the waiting vehicles.

"I wish to hell Joe Faber were here," said Busch. "He could talk the lingo."

"Ha!" said Ben. "They laughed when I sat down at the piano," and tackling the nearest *gendarme,* he said, *"Qu'est-ce qui est arrivé, mon vieux?"*

"Les matelots sont en grève," said the *flic* with an amiable smile. *"'Y aura pas de bon voyage pour vous. Faut marcher au Parc de la Heve."*

"Parc de la quoi?" said Ben and Busch said, "What the hell goes on here, Ben?"

"I'm trying to find out, *mi comandante,* gimme a chance. The cop says we can't sail, the seamen are on strike. They're taking us some place, some kind of park I think he said."

"Park?" said Tony Pellegrini. "Who the hell wants to go to the park?"

The Parc de la Heve was located about four kilometers outside the city and was a detention center for third-class passengers when the Compagnie Générale Transatlantique couldn't meet its schedules. At least, that's what they told Ben Blau.

There were a number of barrack-like buildings divided into individual small rooms with three or four cots in each room and a central dining hall in a separate building, where the men were given a skimpy meal. They protested about this immediately, sending word through a waiter to the director of the place who came on the scene and began to shout and wave his arms before anyone had said anything.

When he had simmered down, Ben explained to him that the men felt the food was inadequate; three men needed wounds dressed; there were no sheets on the beds; no facilities for bathing and

what the hell was happening anyhow? "We were supposed to sail on the *Normandie* today."

The *patron* said he was not responsible ("He only works here," Ben translated); he would call a doctor; he would see about the sheets; the seamen, the dogs, were on strike and he didn't know anything about anything, but he expected them to maintain order and if they didn't there were *gendarmes* all around the *parc* anyhow and nobody was allowed to leave or come into the place and when he knew something they would know something and he would tell it to the gentlemen. This word he underlined in an obviously nasty manner.

After lunch the men inspected the eight-foot wire fence around the joint, winking at each other and announcing that this was going to be a cinch. Aside from that, they walked around inside the *parc,* slept on the bare mattresses in the rooms or chewed the fat.

Just before dinner Busch called a meeting in the dining hall and announced that they were setting up an organization. There were loud groans. He explained that it was necessary; that they had to set an example of discipline in the face of the French government's hostility, and he had had word that a couple of the guys had already gone over the fence and been arrested in the city. This would never do, Busch said. "We have a history and a tradition and we will maintain it till we reach New York and disband in an orderly fashion."

At this point a delegation from the French seamen's union arrived and asked to talk to *le commandant.* Busch received them in the presence of all the men and Ben acted as interpreter again.

The union spokesman explained that the veterans could not sail, as the seamen were on strike, which they knew. Then he told them that the government didn't want them turned loose in France and that within a week they would be taken to Cherbourg and put aboard the *Paris* if *le salaud* Daladier could find scabs to work the stewards department. The Navy was going to sail the ship.

"Then we won't sail," said Busch.

"We know," said the union spokesman with a smile, "that you would not like to sail in a scab ship. However, there's nothing you can do about it. You will be obliged to sail by *force majeure.*

"Therefore," he said, "I am delegated to inform you that the union grants you permission to sail in this ship, as we do not want you to get into any trouble with our government that would delay your departure for home after your service to democracy in Spain."

He lifted his arm in the clenched fist salute and the entire dining hall exploded into sound. Someone shouted, *"Salud!"* Some yelled, *"Vive la France et les pommes de terres frites!"* A couple guys who

had smuggled in a bottle began to sing *La Marseillaise* but Busch finally got them all quiet.

Joe Kominsky suggested that it might be a good idea if the men made a contribution on the spot to the strike fund, and *franc* notes began to fly through the air, wadded into small balls. The union spokesman blushed like a girl. Somebody in the back of the hall shouted, "Anybody we catch tipping the fink stewards on the ship goes over the side!" The two drunks started to sing *La Marseillaise* all over again and others joined in, and the union delegates embraced as many men as they could reach, kissing each of them on both cheeks, lifting their arms again in salute and shouting, *"Vive le bataillon Leencoln! Vive les héros de la Brigade Internationale! Vive les Américains!"*

"Boy!" said Tony Pellegrini, "wait'll you see the service we get on that tub when they find *this* out!"

"Simple," said Kominsky. "We won't *tell* 'em. When we get to *New York* we tell 'em why they didn't get a tip."

The evening meal was much improved. A doctor came and dressed the wounded, refusing to accept any fee; sheets appeared on the beds but there was nothing that could be done about a bath; there simply were no showers or tubs in the place.

At about eleven that night when Ben was in bed and half asleep with the dangling light bulb out, Francis Lang arrived, accompanied by one of the gate-keepers and a *gendarme.*

Between the three of them they had two cases of Scotch, a half-dozen cartons of American cigarettes, bags of sandwiches, bars of chocolate, boxes of cookies and even some chewing gum. Within a moment one entire building was awake and for the next two hours there was a drinking party.

Lang was drunk long before anybody else had begun to feel his liquor, and was holding forth. He was furious at their detention and showed them a cable he had sent from Paris that afternoon. It read:

ROOSEVELT, WHITE HOUSE, WASHINGTON, DC, ETATS-UNIS. FRENCH GOVERNMENT HOLDING HUNDRED FIFTY AMERICAN VETERANS SPANISH WAR CONCENTRATION CAMP LE HAVRE. THESE MEN HEROES IN GREATEST TRADITION AMERICAN STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY. ALL DECENT FRENCH OUTRAGED THIS INDIGNITY AMERICANS SELF-DISTINGUISHED IN FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM. URGE PROTEST THROUGH STATE DEPARTMENT SOONEST. SPEED HOMEWARD VOYAGE THESE MEN, CREDIT TO OUR DEMOCRATIC HERITAGE. FRANCIS X. LANG.

"Not bad, not bad," the men said. "You think he'll do anything about it?"

"Quien sabe?" said Lang. "France's a sovereign nation. Daladier's a *salaud."*

"Éspèce de morpion méchanique," said Ben Blau and Lang howled. The guys wanted to know what *that* meant and Lang explained that it couldn't be translated, but no greater insult could be offered a Frenchman unless you were to bite your thumbnail in his face.

"But what's it *mean?"* said Busch and Ben said, "Sort of a mechanical crab."

"Sort of a mechanical crab?" said Pellegrini. "I don't see anything insulting in that. It don't even make good sense."

"Where'd you learn French?" said Kominsky.

"My good fellow," said Ben in his best Oxford accent, "I also speak Italian, Yiddish, German and a bit of Swiss."

"Swiss my ass-hole," said Pellegrini. "The Swiss speak German, French or Italian."

"Don't parade your ignorance, my good man," said Ben.

"How'd you get in here anyhow, Lang?" Busch said. "Nobody's allowed. We're in quarantine or something."

"What password did you use?" said Ben.

"Universal password," said Lang, rubbing his thumb and first finger together. "Universal solvent."

"What're you up to now?" said Ben to Lang, who was sitting on the opposite cot with a bottle of White Horse in his hand and was drinking from the neck.

"Writin' a book," said Lang. "Writin' a play. Both 't the same time. Look, ma, no hands!" he said and tilted the bottle.

"Be sure you've got a cute little Spanish girl in it with black hair and big black eyes," said Ben.

Lang lowered the bottle slowly and looked at Ben for a long moment. He rose from the cot with difficulty and said, "Gotta go t' the can."

The party broke up soon after and Busch's voice could be heard in the hallway, shouting, "Lights out! Lights out, guys."

Slightly jiggled by the drink, Ben was half asleep again with the light out when he woke with a start. Somebody was sitting on his bed. He sat up and felt a hand placed gently on his shoulder.

"Relax, Ben," the thick voice said, "it's me. Zav."

Ben said, "Keep your voice down, the other guys are asleep."

"OK," said Lang, his hand still on Ben's shoulder. "I hadda come back. You were makin' hostility with me."

"Says which?" said Ben, moving slightly so that Lang's hand fell off his shoulder.

"Talkin' 'bout a li'l Spanish girl with black eyes."

"I wasn't making any hostility."

"I didn' expect it from you, Ben," said Lang. "You're a colleague.

You know how much I loved that gal. A colleague should understand a colleague." There was a catch in his voice.

"I didn't mean it nasty."

"You know wha' happened t' her, don' you?"

"No," said Ben. "What happened?"

"Dead," said Lang. "Killed. Air-raid. Day I saw you las' at the front."

"I'm sorry to hear it," said Ben and they were silent for a moment. He could feel Lang sobbing quietly and put his own hand on Lang's knee.

"Take it easy, pal," he said. "Remember what you had and be grateful for it."

"I never slep' with her," said Lang.

"I didn't ask if you did."

"Swear t' God I never."

"That's not important," said Ben.

"Los'," said Lang, "All los'. Whole thing's los'. Ev'rything."

"Nothing's lost," said Ben.

"You dunno," said Lang. "Whatta *you* know? Soldier don' know nothin'. Jus' carries out orders. I been behin' the scenes. Know wha' goes on."

"What goes on?"

"Sell-out. *Treason!* Fascis' bastards at work. British workin' with elements in Spain. Perfidious Albion. You'll see." He put his hand on Ben's shoulder again and leaned closer. "You know me, Ben," he said. "I'd die in pieces f' what I believe."

"I know."

"I swear by Jesus Mary an' the Holy Ghos'."

"OK, OK, only keep your voice down."

"You wan' dollars, Ben? I got dollars."

"I may take you up on that some time."

"I got so much money," Lang said in a tragic voice. "*So* much money." His hand clamped down on Ben's shoulder. "You tell me—how do I *do* it?"

"Do what?"

"You know."

"How the hell should I know? I'm not a mind-reader."

"Join."

"Join what?"

"Party. *El partido.*"

Ben was having trouble staying awake. "I told you I'm not a member," he said. "What makes you think you want to?"

"I see things. I know wha' goes on. Wanna be like *you.* Wanna be like D'lores. Wanna *fight.* Die 'n pieces f'r what I believe."

"The important thing is to live," said Ben.

"Sure. Sure. *Tell* me."

"You better talk to somebody who belongs," said Ben.

"You're a great writer, Ben," Lang said suddenly, and Ben was momentarily baffled by the switch.

"You never read a line I ever wrote."

"Don' need to," said Lang. "I c'n tell."

"How?"

"Osmosis," said Lang. "You're what I shoulda been."

"You flatter me."

"You don' know why I love the Brigade, do you?"

"No. Why?"

Lang shook his head. "Figgered you'd know. Busch knows. He knows *every*thing...without anybody tell 'm. No lousy intellectual like you."

"You better go to bed, Zav."

"Pronto. En seguida. Hadda come back. Can' have you makin' hostility with me, *compañero."*

"I didn't mean to, Zav. I'm sorry about Dolores."

"Skip it. *Me cago en la muerte.* Repeat that after me. *Me cago en la muerte."* Ben didn't get a chance to repeat it, for Lang went right on. "'s all down the drain. *Todo.* Spain. *Todo el mundo.* Down the drain. Los' an' gone."

"How you gonna get back to town?"

"Cab waitin'. Hotel room. Falcon. Lef' my wife 'n Paris."

"Your wife with you?"

"Paris. Georges Cinq."

"You better go, Zav."

"Gone. See you t'morrow. Tol' Busch. Be back t' take you outta here."

When Lang had gone, Ben found himself wakeful and thinking about the writer. He wondered about the guy, what was eating him, aside from the obvious; what was likely to become of him.

That was one hell of a coincidence, if you want to call it that! Is that why *I* want to join the party? Ben wondered. For crappy romantic reasons like that? Joe is dead. Wanna die 'n pieces like Joe. Didn't you even say as much to Pellegrini? Joe was one and you're one and I admire and respect you?

You'd better give this some thought, Ben said to himself. You'd better remember what it was Joe said to you that night climbing Hill 666 when you relieved him of his job of company clerk and made him your adjutant—and killed him. Joe said: "You started something, Ben, when you joined the Brigade. You started something you may not be able to finish."

At the time Blau had thought: What the hell, he means I won't come out of here alive. But obviously he had meant more than that.

He meant more than the fact that I tossed a good living down the drain (*'s all down the drain*) when I sent that cablegram to Ferguson. (*...so far as this paper is concerned, you're a dead duck in more ways than one.*)

Joe meant: your life has taken a new direction from which there is no retreat. Either you advance or you hold your position till you die fighting. Is that true? Or is that romantic crap, too? Could it be true? You told Tony that the Communists were the most effective force in the world, a force with which you wanted to identify yourself because it was fighting for what you've thought you believed in for a long time. Did you mean that? Are you sure you *want* to be identified with it? Or has your grief over the loss of Spain (for it *is* lost) and the loss of Joe thrown you into a sentimental tizzy? What will identification with it mean? Is *that* what Joe meant—that he saw the way you were going and wanted you to look before you leaped? Joe, what did you really mean?...

He was awakened the next day by Busch, who came into the room and, in the Voice of Command, said, "Where's that cunt, Lang? He said he was coming to get me out of here, take me to breakfast."

"What time is it?"

"Nearly noon."

"Lang said last night you know why he loves the Brigade."

"He did?"

"Yeah. Why does he?"

"How the hell should I know?" said Busch. "Maybe he's a fairy. All I know is, I need a bath."

Fifteen minutes later Ben, Busch, Pellegrini and Kominsky walked to the far side of the *parc* and, on an impulse, went over the fence. Ben ripped his pants on the barbed wire. They ducked down and around the hill on which the *parc* was built, found a street and followed it downhill, feasting their eyes on the Atlantic Ocean on the right.

"It would be just like them," said Kominsky, "once we get on a boat, to send a Nazi submarine after us and knock us off."

"That way we'd get a bath for sure," said Ben.

When they got down into the city they decided that Ben should ask a cop for directions to a public bath-house, and Busch said, "Your French better be good, or we'll all get picked up." His conscience was beginning to hurt him. He had made quite a speech about the guys who had gone over the fence the day before, and here he was doing it himself.

The *gendarme* told them the bath-houses were all closed on Sunday and Ben asked for directions to the Hotel Falcon. The *flic*

smiled and told them it was a couple blocks away, saluted and said, *sotto voce, "Viva la Republica!"* and strolled off.

On the way they passed the Café Guillaume Tell and Ben insisted that since they'd missed breakfast and had no lunch, they would have to sit down, be his guests, pretend to be tourists and have *café crème* and a *croissant.* "I used to come here often," he said, "the year I shipped in the *McKeesport.*"

When they got to the Falcon Ben told the desk clerk they wanted a room. The clerk looked at them quizzically—four men with no luggage—and said, *"Pourquoi?"*

"Pour prendre un bain," said Ben.

"Un bain!"

"Les bains publiques sont fermés le dimanche," said Ben.

"What sort of gibberish is this?" said Busch, and Ben waved one hand at him.

The clerk deliberated a long time and suddenly Ben had an inspiration and told him they were friends of M. Francis Lang, the famous writer who was a guest of the hotel. The clerk's eyebrows shot up. He looked at them in their oddly fitting clothes, then he had an inspiration himself. *"Cinquante francs,"* he said.

Ben decided not to argue about the price for fear the man would change his mind, so he paid immediately and told the clerk to send up four *fines.*

They followed the bellhop to the room, stripped off their clothes, flipped a *franc* piece to see who got the first bath and Busch won. "What the hell was wrong with that dope at the desk?" said Kominsky.

"Nobody rents a hotel room to take a *bath,*" said Pellegrini.

"Oh, give me a ho-ome... where the buf-falo roam!" Busch sang from the bathroom, and Ben looked in. Busch was soaping himself deliriously, standing in the tub. There was a large copper pitcher on a shelf next to the tub and seeing Ben, Busch said, "Hey, take that thing and rinse me off, will you?"

"What a cute little toilet!" Kominsky said, looking into the bathroom. "But whatta they got *two* for?"

"It's not a toilet," Ben said. "It's a *bidet.*"

"What's a beeday?"

"You're not old enough," said Ben, pouring water over Busch's shoulders.

They took turns bathing and rinsing each other, and the brandies arrived. They sat naked on the bed in the warm room or sprawled in the two armchairs, toasting each other.

Ben called the desk and asked to be connected with Lang. The voice that answered was strange, but it assured him that Francis Lang was speaking. And when the speaker finally recognized who

was calling, he said, "Hi, Ben. I'm sorry. I'm in bed. Sick. Where the hell are you?"

Ben explained that they were in the hotel and Lang had a sudden surge of energy, said they should come to his room—301—as soon as they were through bathing. Ben told him that if he was sick they could see him again, but he insisted that his heart would be broken if they didn't come. "It's nothing," he said. "I tied one on last night. *You* know."

When they had all dressed, they went to 301 and Zav received them sitting up in bed. He had a portable typewriter on his lap, a pitcher of ice-water on the bed table. He was amiable and interested in how they had escaped from the "concentration camp." He offered them brandy, which they drank. He had a couple himself.

By the time they told him about Ben's difficulties with the desk clerk, he had had enough to feel it and he picked up the phone and called the desk. To the men's astonishment, he spoke English to the clerk, who apparently understood it perfectly.

"This is Francis X. Lang," he announced. "I'm checking out of this room immediately. I want to tell you why. Number One: you've insulted my friends... What's that? The four men who rented a room to take a bath. They're heroes, every one of them.

"Number Two: I've been coming to this hotel since 1924. I will never come here again... What's that?... *Fermes ta gueule* and listen to me! You cannot insult heroes of the war in Spain, even if they're *not* friends of mine!

"Number Three: I have friends all over the world who travel a great deal. Not one of them—I say—*écoutes-moi!* Not one of them will ever stop at this hotel again!

"*C'est assez! Cochon de bourgeois!* Send a porter up to pack my bags, *sur-le-champ!*"

The four men were sitting and standing there with their mouths open. After he had hung up, Busch finally said, "You were kidding."

"The hell I was," Lang said, climbing tentatively out of bed and starting to dress. "I'm a man of principle. Nobody can insult *my* friends. I'm loyal to my friends. *Jusqu'au mort!*"

He stood in the middle of the room in his shorts, a well-formed man getting soft around the middle, and made a gesture. "*Mais quel geste!*" he said. "*Mes amis,*" he said, "*ce soir nous allons faire la bombe!*"

"Says which?" said Kominsky.

"An old Spanish custom," said Lang. "We tie one on. We paint the town. We make a night of it. Have you ever eaten at *La Marmite?*" He answered himself. "Of course not. But you will, Oscar, you *will.*"

There was a knock on the door. An apologetic porter stood there

with the manager of the hotel behind him. Lang brought the porter in, holding him by one arm, and slammed the door in the manager's face.

Out of his pants pocket he took several large bills, gave them to the porter and said in French, Pay my bill and keep the change. Then he added, Pack all my clothes, my typewriter, my papers and send them in a cab to *La Marmite.*

The porter was pop-eyed. *"A la Marmite, m'sieu?"*

"Naturellement," said Lang, climbing into his pants.

At the famous restaurant on the Rue des Galéons, Lang said he would do the ordering. But first, a sherry. He ordered a bottle of *Dry Sack* and when Busch protested that it was Spanish sherry, Zav said, *"Mi comandante,* this is the best sherry in the world and it was imported long before *el puto* started his rebellion. In any event, the British have had a monopoly of it for decades and a British monopolist is no better than a Spanish fascist, no matter who's in power. Drink!"

They drank.

Then they ate. *Paté de fois gras, potage,* a fish with a good *chablis, chateaubriand* with *pommes soufflés.* Lang had a bottle of *Chateauneuf du Pape* with the steak but insisted that the others must drink *Piper Heidesieck.* They had *champignons au beurre,* a *mousse de chocolat,* ice-cream, coffee. Ben ordered brandy but Lang countermanded him, saying, "In Normandy, my friend, you drink *Calvados* and like it." He looked at Ben.

"You didn't eat enough to feed a worm," he said.

"I was ashamed," said Ben, thinking of Spain.

"Ridiculous," said Lang. "Nothing's too good for the proletariat."

He was plastered but amazingly articulate. He seemed to have got a second wind in the drinking bout he had started—when? Ben wondered. Surely not last night. He was lit when he arrived.

"It would not become heroes like you," said Lang, "to patronize the cat houses on this block. These are simply sailors' dives. Nothing's too good for the working class—and that's what they usually get. Nothing." He laughed. "I said that before, didn't I?" He looked around the table dramatically and said, "I will rent a car and we will drive to Paris.

"I will take you to see a particular friend of mine who lives on the Rue Blondel. A *poule de luxe.* She has a calling card on which are engraved the words: *'Mademoiselle Rose. Spécialités'."*

His luggage had arrived at the restaurant and he actually called the manager over and told him to rent a car, but they reminded him that they had to report back to the *Parc de la Heve* after all!

This seemed to puzzle him for a moment. Then he said, *"Mais certainement. J'avais oublié."*

Ben looked at Busch and the others. They were bored with Lang and showed it. Busch even indicated with one thumb that they ought to scram, but they were all as polite as could be.

"You may help me, then," Lang said. "I have to find a hotel. A *working-class* hotel."

"What for?"

"To live in till you guys sail."

"Why not go back to the Falcon?"

"Jamais!" cried Lang. *"Jamais de la vie. L'attaque! Toujours l'attaque!"*

"There's nothing around here, Zav," said Ben, "but waterfront fleabags. I've been here before. Used to ship out."

Lang looked at him with amazement. "You have?"

"In 1928."

"Ever *eat* here before?"

"Never," Ben lied. "You don't want a waterfront fleabag."

"That's precisely what I *do* want," Lang said. "Nothing's too lousy for the bourgeoisie." He tried to stand up but couldn't. He shouted across the restaurant, *"L'addition!"* and the head waiter came running with it anxious to get this particular party out of the place before it made trouble.

Lang paid the three hundred and forty-five franc bill with a five hundred franc note and started to walk across the floor. He fell flat. The men picked him up and with Busch on one side and Ben on the other, they got him out of the place. Kominsky and Pellegrini carried the luggage.

"Take me to The Crystal Palace," said Lang, majestically. "There's a little girl there who has ball-bearings."

"No, no," said Ben. "You want a hotel. Not a whore-house."

"C'est égal," said Lang. "Alcohol gives the desire but takes away the performance. Shakespeare. *Je m'en fous!"*

The procession moved slowly down the narrow street past the establishments called *The Moon, The Crystal Palace* and *The Hives* ("Who could go in a dump named *that?*" said Kominsky) and arrived at a dingy house that bore the magnificent name: *Grand Hotel des Principautés Unis.*

They stopped and looked at it and Ben started to lead Lang on, but he wouldn't budge. "We are home," he said. "Install me." Busch shrugged, and they moved into the narrow hallway that had a desk at one end with an ancient crone with a beard sitting before a cash-register.

They registered Lang and carried him up one flight and dumped him on a sagging bed in a filthy room. They stood looking at him. "We can't leave him in a dive like this," said Busch. "He could be slugged, robbed, murdered."

"Not a chance," said Ben. "I know these places. He's as safe here as he would be in the Georges Cinq in Paris." (He remembered something.)

"Then let's blow," said Busch. "And if I were you, I'd take his wallet, lock the door and throw the key in through the transom."

Lang seemed to be out cold and Ben was about to leave when he said, on an impulse, "Look, you guys go. I'll undress him and get him in bed. Then I'll catch a cab back to the place."

A groan from the man on the bed persuaded the other guys that they wanted to go immediately, so they agreed. "You turn up by morning," said Busch, "or I'll have the cops after you."

"I'll be there long before."

The others left and Ben started to undress the unconscious man. Lang came to with a start, staring wildly in front of him. He didn't recognize Ben or the place he was in or, apparently, anything. Ben saw immediately that he was beyond reach but tried to quiet him.

"Lie down, Zav," he said softly, "lie down and sleep."

Lang leaped to his feet on the bed and almost fell off it. Then he shouted, *"Abajo! Aviónes!* Get *down!"*

He dropped flat off the bed onto the floor and Ben was almost certain he had broken a dozen ribs, but if he had, he showed no sign of it. He cowered on the floor, shaking like jelly, alternately mumbling incoherently then letting out wierd shouts.

"Asesinos!" he screamed suddenly. *"Criminales!* Murderers!"

Ben knelt beside him and patted him. He didn't know what to do. He looked around, saw a pitcher standing in a bowl on a washstand, and went over and got it.

Gingerly, he poured water on Lang's head, but it had no visible effect on him. Zav said, "D'lores, D'lores, D'lores. *Elle est morte, morte dans sa jeunesse."* He sat up suddenly, raised one arm and sang in a cracked voice.

"Arise, ye pris'ners of star-*va*-tion;
"Arise, ye wretched of the earth;
"For jus-tice thun'ers condem-*na*-tion
"An' a better worl's in birth—"

"The hell it *is,"* he said quite distinctly. " 's gone, dead, los' and gone an' fulla shit. I shit on it. I *shit* on it!" He started to sob and Ben thought, Now I can do something with him, but when he approached, Lang thrust out both hands and shoved him away.

He let out a long, wavering scream and grabbed his belly. "They got me!" he shouted. "Oh my God Almighty Jesusmaryan'joseph! *Judice me, Deus,"* he cried, *"et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta; ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me!"*

"Zav," said Ben. "Zav, look at me, it's Ben. Your friend. I'm here. Don't be afraid. . ."

"Hail Mary, full of grace!" Lang said, crossing himself, dropping to his knees. "The Lord is with Thee: blessed art Thou among women—" His voice began to rise and he kept crossing himself over and over. "...and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen."

He was shouting now and Ben heard the door of the room open and looked over his shoulder. There were two powerful men standing there, who said the noise was keeping them awake and Ben's French suddenly became as fluent as water.

"My friend's drunk," he said. "Raving. Help me, comrades."

The two men came into the room and grasped Lang. He started to struggle but they threw him on the bed and one of them picked up a blanket, rapidly rolled it and threw it across the fighting, screaming man, tying it down on either side.

Ben told them to wait. He had to make a telephone call for help. He reached into Lang's pocket, took out his wallet, opened it and offered a bill to the two men. They shook their heads. He slipped the wallet into his pocket.

"Be back," Ben said and ran out of the room, down the stairs. By the time he had found a telephone in a small bar down the street, he was out of breath.

He read the instructions for operating the phone six times before he understood them, then went to the inevitable old woman presiding over *la caisse* and got the slug, returned to the phone. It took him fifteen minutes to get the Georges V hotel in Paris, and he was sweating like a pig, worried that the two men in the hotel room might have left or injured Zav in some way, trying to keep him quiet.

"Madame Francis Lang," he said, waited, praying that she would be in. Then a pleasant feminine voice with a strong American accent said, *"J'écoute."*

"Mrs. Lang?"

"Yes?"

"My name's Blau. Ben Blau. I'm in Le Havre. You must come here. Francis's ill."

"Frank?" the voice said. "He's *dead?"*

"No, no," Ben said. "This's Ben Blau, a member of the Lincoln Battalion. He's in the *Grand Hotel des Principautés Unis."*

"Is he badly hurt?"

"He's not hurt, Mrs. Lang," Ben said. "He's sick."

2

December 10, 1947

After the paper went to bed, Ben left the *Daily* office with Dave and as they emerged on Twelfth Street a man stepped up to them, looked at Dave Bennett and Ben and said to Ben, "Mr. Blau?"

Ben nodded and the man served him with the subpoena and walked away. They stood in the doorway looking at it and Dave said, "Maybe I better get back upstairs and knock out a bulletin before they mold page one."

"Why not wait and see if anybody else on the paper gets one?" Ben asked the Negro editor.

"This calls for your appearance tomorrow," Dave said. "You better get downtown quick and see Tabatchnik. If there were others, we'd have heard of them by now."

"You've got something there," Ben said, and added, "See you in church."

Dave dashed back to the ancient elevator and Ben walked to the coffee pot on the corner and called the lawyer's office. Tabatchnik answered and said, "Come right on down."

Blau started for the subway, his mind racing like an engine. What accounts for *this?* he wondered. Why me? Who the hell am *I?* And why nobody else on the paper?

True enough, one of the Hollywood writers who had just been indicted was a Spanish vet, and there was the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee under attack. Was it open season now on the vets?

Before the train had pulled in Ben remembered two related facts. Fact one: Lang had been before the committee in secret session only the day before. Fact two: the papers this morning had carried a statement by Lang's sponsor, Flax, quoting him as saying that Lang's program would be resumed this coming Sunday. He had been ill for two weeks, Flax had said. (That could be the truth, Ben thought, but why be naive?)

Zav, Zav, how could you? Oh, be fair to the guy, his mind replied. How do you know he fingered you? How *could* he have fingered you? We were never in the party together and Lang was in long enough to get one toe wet, back in 1939. (The water was too hot, or something.)

But Lang had supplied the reason—back in 1938—for any defection on his part in 1947—if he had actually gone over to the other side. Ben recalled the conversation. Lang had said he was born in the

working class, hated every moment of it—the poverty—and would return to it only over his dead body.

Who likes poverty? Ben remembered answering, or something to that effect. You might have actually enjoyed the *Wanderjahr* when you were a bum. You were seventeen years old and game for anything. But did you enjoy the year at sea? And how did you like 1931, when the *World* folded up and you (and two thousand others) were thrown out on the street?

And how did you like 1932 when you worked in groceries and drug stores as a twenty-two-year-old delivery boy—when you could find that kind of work? When Leo was struggling for a living with his wife and couldn't help at all, and you walked the streets for days, climbed the stairs of employment agencies, went out to interviews at five a. m. only to find a hundred jobless men ahead of you; when you lived on a bowl of *minestrone* a day in the former speakeasy on Thirteenth Street? And then went on the breadline that stretched across Times Square because you wouldn't go to Leo's for a meal or a handout? (Or was that earlier?)

Ben wished there was a meeting of his party branch that night, before he faced the committee, but he knew they'd only advise him to do what he was doing—see a lawyer.

OK, he thought, as he got out at Wall Street. So see him and don't be a conclusion jumper. Try to think dialectically, cause and effect. The committee has its own reasons for doing things. Then he remembered the morning paper again. A phrase leaped to his mind. An anonymous spokesman for the witch hunters had said that the outfit might "expand the scope of its inquiry" beginning with the open sessions and look into "subversion in the Armed Forces."

That's *you,* thought Ben. Whom did you subvert when you were in the AUS? Aside from yourself, I mean? He answered it as he found the office building and looked up Tabatchnik on the directory. The only person I successfully subverted in the Army, when I wasn't even a party member because nobody was a party member in the Army, was Ben Blau. Got him kicked from pillar to post. Amazing! Without so much as lifting a finger.

What happened in the Army that they can hold against you? That OCS deal? What happened in Spain that ditto? Blau is now elevated to the post of Public Enemy Number X without ever having been so much as a Section Organizer! (Comrade X, no less.)

Sam Tabatchnik was as broad as he was tall (about five feet five) but he gave an impression of enormous strength, enormous energy. Ben showed him the subpoena, which he referred to as a "Christmas present," and Sam almost smiled.

"It's pretty short notice," he said, "so perhaps we'd better get to work fast. Why do you suppose they tagged *you?*"

"You've got me," Ben said. "I work on the *Daily*, but that wouldn't seem to be the point of attack. Nobody else has got one that I know of."

"I doubt it myself," Tabatchnik said. "Didn't you used to work for the commercial press?"

"Sure. The old *World*. The *Globe-Times*. I dumped my job as foreign correspondent for the *Globe* to join the Brigade."

"I remember reading about that," said Sam. He looked at Ben. "Usually a subpoena is preceded by a friendly witness. Who could *that* be?"

"Could be Francis X. Lang, but I doubt *that*."

"Why?"

"I've known him casually, haven't seen him since 19— well, I guess it *was* a year ago, but the connection was never intimate."

Tabatchnik's brows lifted. "Is he a party member?"

"In '39," said Ben. "For a few months. Dropped out at the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact."

"That doesn't rule him out," said the lawyer, "but let's get into the business. You have very limited rights before this outfit. You know that."

"I know."

"Theoretically, the First Amendment forecloses any inquiry into your political associations or beliefs. Also, you're a newspaper man, and this could easily be a direct attack on the *Daily*."

"Nix on that," said Ben.

Tabatchnik looked at him. "Why do you say that?"

"I didn't understand the position those Hollywood people took and I doubt whether the public does either."

"I'd agree about a wide segment of the public, but why don't *you* understand it?"

"Look," said Ben. "I want to say *this:* Certainly I'm a Communist. I've been a Communist since January 1939. I'm proud of my membership and I'm going to tell you why. . ."

"Very good," Sam said drily, "and very romantic."

"What's romantic about it?"

"This won't be *your* forum," the lawyer said. "If you were a so-called friendly witness, you could testify from here to doomsday. But you're marked lousy in advance by your history, which is a public history, and you'll be restricted to yes or no answers."

"So, what's wrong with that?"

"The point is," said Sam, "these guys aren't interested in the truth. They're not interested in facts. They don't give a damn whether you're a Communist or not. Their aim is to smear the party, smear anybody who could remotely be called sympathetic to party

ideas—and that takes in a hell of a lot of good people—and if they can put you in prison, they'd like to do that, too."

"All right," said Ben. "What alternatives are there?"

"It's easy enough to go to prison," Sam said. "Our idea is to keep you out. You know, of course, that the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution protects you from being forced to testify against yourself."

"Wait a minute," said Ben. "Isn't that the one that has something about 'tend to incriminate and degrade' in it?"

"The words don't appear in the Amendment, but the judges like to have you explain *why* you're invoking the Fifth, and the phrase has become something of a formula."

"Uh-uh," said Ben. "The minute you say *that* you confess you're guilty of something, and I'm damned if I'm guilty of anything except having ideas the Committee doesn't like."

"You're wrong, Ben," said the lawyer. "The Fifth Amendment historically grew out of the necessity to protect the innocent from inquisition. *Real* inquisition—the rack and the thumb-screw. Grew out of the English Star Chamber..."

"*You* know that and *I* know it, but will the public understand it?"

"Why are you so worried about the public?"

"Because the public is the people, that's why. Because those are the people I want to understand what I'm saying. Don't you?

"Of course, but I said before, you're in a box to begin with. The Hollywood people..." Ben started to interrupt, but Sam held up one hand. "Hear me out. As I understand it, they were faced with the choice of saying, 'No, I'm not,' and having a stoolpigeon say they were. Choice two: saying, 'Sure I am'—as *you* want to—and then being asked, 'Who else?' Because that's the next question.

"If you won't say who else, you're automatically in contempt. That carries a penalty of from one month to one year in jail and from a hundred to a thousand dollar fine. Wait a minute, I'm not finished.

"*Now,* if you believe, as they obviously did, that the committee is clearly unconstitutional because it can't legislate in the field of opinion or association, then you're faced with the necessity of issuing a flat challenge to the committee's authority to ask such questions."

"I get it," said Ben. "But what's wrong with saying, 'Sure I am, but I'll be damned if I'll tell you anybody else'?"

"Because the minute you answer the first question you admit they have a right to ask it. Let's stop right here and get this straight. Do you think they *have?*"

"No, I don't."

"Why don't you? *That's* the point you've got to try to get over to the public, by way of the press."

"Fat chance I stand of their printing it."

"I don't know. The Committee's in bad odor right now. A lot depends on what kind of a witness you make, how you handle yourself, etc."

Ben put his hand to his head. "Then I'm a dead pigeon right now."

"Why do you say that?" said Tabatchnik with astonishment.

"Look at me!" said Ben. "Do I look like Robert Taylor? Or even Adolph Menjou?"

"You look all right to me," Sam said, "but let's get back to the point. We'll have a briefing session, like they did in the Army. You were in the Army, weren't you?"

"You asked me," said Ben, "why I don't think they have the right to ask the question. I thought one of those guys gave a pretty good answer. Something about having a secret ballot, and General Eisenhower himself wouldn't say whether he was a Republican or a Democrat, and what was good enough for Ike was good enough..."

"It was a wise-crack," said Sam. "The Eisenhower part. The secret ballot is OK, but if you believe that the First Amendment precludes any inquiry into your political opinions..."

"I'm still worried," said Ben, "that most people won't understand why anybody who's a Communist, a Republican, a Prohibitionist or even a Vegetarian shouldn't be willing to say so. We've got a long tradition in our country of speaking your piece."

"We'll work on that," said Sam. "I'll be the committee. You be the witness."

"That's what I *am,*" said Ben. "Mr. Chairman, you may fire when you see the reds of my eyes"...

When Ben got back to the furnished room on Fifteenth Street it was seven o'clock, and when he opened the door with his key he found Sue Menken sitting in the battered armchair.

"Hi," she said.

"Who let *you* in?"

"Aren't you the romantic duck?" she said. "Mrs. Hornstein. Who else? *You* never gave me the key."

"You'll give me a bad reputation with my landlady," Ben said with a smile.

"You've got one already," Sue said. "Or don't you read the newspapers any more?"

"Have they got the story already?"

She handed him the *World-Telegram* and showed him the story

with his name and the names of several other people the committee had called for the next morning. He didn't recognize any of them. He asked her if she did and she shook her head.

"But I know who fingered *you,*" she said.

"You do?"

"Sure. The guy who's responsible for your throwing yourself into my arms so madly a year ago."

"Zav?"

"None other."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because two and two make five, or didn't you know it?"

Ben shook his head and sat on the bed. "I doubt it," he said.

"Why?"

"What reason would he have for doing it?"

"Does he have to have a reason?"

"Certainly," Ben said indignantly. "There's a reason for everything." He looked at her without smiling and said, "Have you met any interesting men recently?"

She shook her head and laughed. "Where I am, hidden behind the enormous bottoms of the *Hausfrauen* buying little frocks at I. Klein, I never see any men except the floor-walker and *he's* nothing to look at." She wiped the smile off her face and said, "Why? Do you want to introduce me to an eligible millionaire who doesn't suffer from your Puritan compulsions?"

"Let's eat," said Ben, getting off the bed, "and I'll tell you why Lang couldn't possibly have named me."

"Couldn't possibly?" she said. "That's an awful strong word, that possibly. Didn't you have a fight with him last year?"

"Argument, yes. Fight, no. But the point is this—this is a man with a guilty conscience. Much as he wanted to escape from the working class, he hasn't forgotten where he came from."

"Now you're being naive as well as Puritanical."

"Stop *saying* that," said Ben, "or I'll bop you in the eye!"

"Just because *you* came out of the middle class and don't want to remember it, you can't say the opposite of Lang and have it make any sense to *me.* I'm no dope. I might be a dope about *you,* but I'm no dope about people I'm not tangled up with."

"OK, explain it."

"I'll explain it," she said as they left the room and started down the stairs. "But I doubt if you'll understand it."

"Why not?" he said and thought, I ought to call Zav up.

"Because you can't forget that Lang was pretty good during Spain, and you're sentimental as hell about Spain; and because he loaned you money and was decent to you; and because you can't

see anything wrong in people without you've been hit over the head with a baseball bat."

"So hit me," he said . . .

When Blau entered the courtroom in Foley Square the next morning, he caught a glimpse of Sue. He started to turn and go back, but Sam Tabatchnik took his arm and moved him toward the front of the room where there was a row of seats for witnesses.

His throat was tight and his mouth was dry and he had the painful sensation in his gut that he had always experienced before action both in Spain and Germany. *Claro,* he thought. He looked around with the conviction that he would see Francis Lang in the room, but there was no sign of him. He had let Sue talk him out of calling the writer the night before, and he was sore about that. But it was ridiculous, for when he had looked in the phone book after he had left her, Zav wasn't listed anyhow.

Then the committee came in and the familiar faces he had seen so often in the newspapers and the newsreels back in October were right there in front of him, and I, he thought, am right here too. He looked at his attorney, who touched his knee and did not smile.

There was a sudden burst of dazzling white light as a half-dozen floods were turned on, and Ben saw that there were newsreel cameras behind the raised bench where the committee sat enthroned. A flock of men appeared with Speed Graphics and took pictures of the committee members as they pulled out papers and pretended to examine them.

One of them took his picture and said, "Hi, Blau." Ben looked puzzled and the photographer said, "Green of the *Globe-Times.*"

What the hell am I doing here? Ben thought, and why is so much money spent for a circus like this? Not for Ben Blau, surely. Not for the other ordinary looking people sitting on the benches on either side, whether spectators or witnesses. One of the Hollywood men, he remembered, had said, "This is the beginning of American concentration camps!"

The atmosphere of a tribunal was established all right, what with the witness chair placed in front of and below the committee, and the jury-box (occupied by the press) and the stenotype reporters and the American flag and the flag of New York State in standards on either side of the committee.

He didn't hear his name called the first time and Tabatchnik had to prod him. And as he stood to move forward, he turned and saw Sue, who raised one hand and closed her thumb and first finger into a circle and smiled her dazzling smile.

The momentary daze he was experiencing, the sense of unreality,

of being on a stage where he certainly didn't belong and had no right to be, disappeared almost immediately after he had been sworn and was sitting in the chair which was so placed that he had to tilt his head back to look up at the committee.

He focused his eyes on the fat red face in the center of the group and didn't even turn to look at the man on his right who was asking the routine questions in a monotone, his Southern accent plucking at Ben's nerves the way that accent had affected him when he was at Fort Bragg as an infantry replacement.

"I was born in Brooklyn, September 17, 1910," he replied. Then, in answer to another question, "Public and two years of high school. Then I quit and bummed around for a year, held down various jobs here and there, shipped out as a merchant seaman in 1928—" he paused and said, "I've written out a statement, gentlemen, that I'd like to read to this committee."

"You can't read a statement," the chairman said, "but you can enter it in the record after you've testified."

"Why not? Other witnesses before this committee have been allowed to read statements. I have some . . ."

"If your statement's anything like the majority of those we get, it would be a waste of time."

"That's a matter of opinion, sir." (There was some booing from the spectators.)

"It's very easy to see," the chairman said, "that you're hostile to this committee before . . . "

"Just a minute, Mr. Chairman," Ben replied. "*You* decided I was a hostile witness before I came into the room. You . . ."

"Just a moment . . ."

". . . you gave out to the newspapers that I was a hostile witness." He held up a newspaper clipping. "It's right here!"

"Mr. Blau, are you represented by counsel?" the Southern accent said.

"I am."

"Counsel will identify himself, please."

"Samuel Tabatchnik, 10 Wall Street."

"Very good. Now Mr. Blau, the committee doesn't want to waste your time, or its own time. So I'm going to ask you questions and I hope you'll give responsive answers."

"Go ahead."

"Mr. Blau, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Commonist Party?"

Ben was momentarily at a loss for words. He had a powerful impulse to throw Sam's advice to the winds and start talking fast, but to stall for time till he could recover his composure, he said. "Are *you* kidding?"

"That's not a responsive answer, Mr. Blau."

"My answer to your question is *this*—if you'll give me a chance to answer it."

"Take all the time you want. It shouldn't take very long. It could be answered yes or no."

"It could be, but that's not the way I'm going to answer it."

"I don't like your attitude, Mr. Blau."

"I don't like your committee, Mr. Chairman, and I'm going to tell you why."

"You're here under subpoena, sir, and you've sworn to tell the truth, if an oath on the Bible means anything . . ."

"Would you believe me under oath?"

"What's that?"

"I said you told the newspapers that I was a hostile witness before you ever saw me. Would you believe me under oath?"

"Answer the question, please."

"The answer is—and you know it—that you have no right to ask that question for the very simple reason . . ."

"We've heard that one before, Mr. Blau."

"Am I accused of something?"

"Nobody's accused you of anything . . ."

"If you have something to accuse me of, accuse me."

"Just a minute, sir."

"Is this a court of law?"

"No, this is a committee of the Congress. Just a moment, Mr. Blau. Maybe you're under a misapprehension about this proceeding. This is a committee of Congress. A legal committee, operating under Public Law number . . ."

"Have I committed any crime?"

"Don't interrupt, please. I'm going to tell you why you're here."

"Please do."

"You're here because this committee has evidence that you're a Commonist, and you're being given a chance now to affirm or deny that you're a Commonist."

"Is it a crime to be a Communist?" (There was more booing.)

"Mr. Blau, this committee has found that the Commonist Party is not a political party like other political parties," said the Southern accent, "but is in fact an illegal, international conspiracy . . ."

"The committee's mistaken, then."

"Are you speaking now as a Commonist, Mr. Blau?"

"Would you believe a Communist under oath, Mr. Chairman?"

"No."

"Then why are you . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, the witness hasn't answered the question. Will

you please direct the witness to answer the question whether or not he is or ever has been a member of the Commonist Party?"

"That's a fact, Mr. Blau. Please . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, can you name one single Communist who has ever been *charged* with committing an act of force or violence, not to mention been convicted of it?"

"You're here to answer questions, Mr. Blau, not ask them."

"I'll answer it when you answer mine." (There was some applause.)

Sam Tabatchnik touched Ben's arm at that point and the chairman said, "Are you prompting the witness, Mr. Tabbick?"

"Tabatchnik. I desire to advise the witness of his constitutional rights, Mr. Chairman."

"I didn't notice the witness ask you for any advice, Mr. Tabak . . ."

"Tabatchnik. You're surely aware, Mr. Congressman, that it's within my province as an attorney to advise my client of his rights at any time I see fit. I sense an attempt on the part of this committee to entrap this witness . . ."

"Nobody's trying to trap anybody, Mr. Lawyer."

"Do you have a witness who has testified that my client has committed any subversive or un-American act—whatever that may be—or *any* act inimical to the interests of the American people . . ."

"Mr. Tabak-chik. The rules of this committee don't permit counsel to argue . . ."

". . . because if you have such a witness, we will demand the right to cross-examine that witness."

"There will be no cross-examination. And if you persist in arguing, sir, I'll have you removed from the room. Nobody's accused of anything. The witness was brought here because we believe he has certain information that affects the security of this country and . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, pardon me, I don't believe you have directed the witness to answer the question."

"I'm directing him now."

"My answer, sir, is that I have done nothing which you or any other agency of the government can accuse me of, let alone prosecute me. The First Amendment . . ."

"I see you've learned your lines well, like all the Commonists we've had before us."

(This time the booing was obviously directed at the chairman, not at Blau.)

"Since you already have the answer to your question, I don't see the point in asking *me,*" Ben said.

"What *is* the answer to my question, Mr. Blau?"

"You believe I'm a Communist. That could be true. And if I admit I am, then I'm smeared all over the country, because the woods are full of people who don't even know what a Communist is and who are prejudiced by the endless propaganda against them . . ."

"Is that your answer?"

"Give me a chance, will you? If I said yes, I'm a Communist, then you'll want to know who else I know who is a Communist. And if I were a Communist, I certainly wouldn't tell you any more than I'd give you the names of the members of my union. But if I say I'm *not* a Communist, then . . ."

"I didn't ask you for a speech, Mr. Blau."

"No, you didn't. The point is this. I'm thirty-seven years old. I have certain opinions which I've formed as the result of my own experience and study. I've never had any hesitation about expressing my ideas. My opinions are well known and I've told thousands of people what I believe in. But I wouldn't tell *you* what day of the week it was if you tried to *force* me and neither would any decent American . . ." (Loud applause.)

"Are you employed by the Commonist *Daily Worker?*"

"Don't you know the answer to that question?"

"Can't you even answer *that* question, Mr. Blau?"

"I don't see the point in asking questions to which you already know the answers." (He felt Tabatchnik touch his knee.)

"Were you formerly employed by the *Globe-Times?*"

"The *Globe-Times* is filed in the New York Public Library."

"You seem to want to be cited for contempt of the Congress of the United States, Mr. Blau."

"Are you trying to frighten me, Mr. Chairman? Because if you are, I'm a human being like any other, and I can be frightened. But not by you."

(The applause and the booing were evenly divided.)

"Nobody's trying to frighten you, Mr. Blau. All we're trying to do, all this committee's trying to do is . . ."

Francis Lang sat in his study listening to the radio. He had a brandy and soda in hand and Anne Lang was sitting in another chair and Peggy O'Brien was at her desk in the corner of the study taking down the dialogue coming over the radio on her stenotype machine.

Zav was enormously excited by what he was hearing. He was waiting for something. What, he couldn't have said. He was aware that Anne was looking at him pretty steadily and he was avoiding her gaze.

—I know about force and violence, Mr. Chairman. I've even

used it—to defend the United States of America and its Constitution, and I'd use it again against any enemy of our people, foreign or domestic.

—Would you use it against Russia?

—Are we at war with Russia?

—If we were, would you?

—You start your war, Mr. Congressman, and you'll have my answer the same day.

—Suppose Russia attacked us?

—It has never attacked anyone in the thirty years of its history.

—What about little Finland?

—Mr. Congressman, you must take me and the rest of the American people for a bunch of dopes.

—Why do you say that?

—Because anyone who read even the commercial newspapers during the Finnish business knows damned well that that was an open provocation, that Britain built the Mannerheim Line and was sending money and arms to General Mannerheim for months before the Soviet Union moved, that France was sending airplanes and was prepared to send troops, only the Soviets were a little too smart for them.

Lang looked at Anne and nodded. She didn't acknowledge the gesture. Her face was sober; her eyes on the floor now.

—Mr. Blau, you were in the armed forces during World War II?

—Are you going to smear my war record, now?

—Nobody's smearing you, Mr. Blau. I don't understand why people like you always seem to be on the defensive.

—The answer to that one is the same as the Soviet Union's answer to the Finnish provocation. I know my enemies. I know who they are and where to find them and what to expect of them. I fought fascism in Spain. I fought it in Germany where it also had machine-guns and bombing planes instead of committees, and I'll fight it here every chance I get.

—That's a pretty speech, Mr. Blau, but I wonder if you'd fight Commonism with as much enthusiasm.

—Communism is no threat to me, Mr. Chairman. Nor is it a threat to my country. It may be a threat to you, I'll concede that. It may be a threat to a lot of VIP's who live on the sweat of other people.

—This committee was appointed by Congress to root out the threat of Commonism because Congress feels that it *is* a threat, and so do the majority of the American people.

—I'm sure a lot of them do, sir. But a lot of them have also learned that Hitler destroyed the German people under the pretext of defending them from Communism. He murdered six million of

my own people under the same pretext—and I'm a Jew and not likely to forget it—and he damned near conquered the world before he was stopped. Your committee . . .

—Mr. Blau, did you ever meet a man named Francis X. Lang?

Lang looked at Anne. This time she looked up. He cursed out loud and poured another drink.

—In the course of thirty-seven years I've met thousands of people, sir, but I'm not aware that that's any business of this committee.

(Someone in the back of the room shouted, "Throw him out!" and the chairman rapped for order.)

—Francis X. Lang, the dramatist?

—I may have met him or I may not. That's my affair and his.

Lang looked into his glass and bit his lips.

—After you returned from Spain, did you write a book?

—You know the answer to that one, too.

—Did Mr. Lang have anything to do with getting that book published?

—Why not ask *him*?

—Was the title of that book, *Volunteer for Liberty*?

—Don't you know?

—Was it circulated during World War II in an Armed Services edition so that American soldiers were exposed to its subversive propaganda?

—That's a queer question, all right!

—What's queer about it?

—In the first place, it wasn't subversive propaganda and in the second place I'm scarcely responsible if the Armed Forces saw fit to circulate my book.

—Are you ashamed of the book?

—Certainly not. I'm proud of it. It was a good book and it told the truth about what happened to me in Spain.

—About Spain, Mr. Witness. When you were there, were you trained by Red Army men?

—That's ridiculous. (Ben felt Tabatchnik's hand touching his knee, but ignored it.)

—Your answer is no?

—Of course.

—Who trained you?

—I had two weeks of training under a former American Army man, whose name was Major Thompson. He was the base commander in the town of Tarazona, near Albacete.

—Did you know a General Walter?

—General Walter was the commander of the Thirty-fifth Divi-

sion of the Spanish Republican Army, of which the International Brigades were a part. These facts are all a matter of record.

—Were you commanded in action by Red Army men?

—I answered that before.

—Do you know General Walter's real name?

—Real name? He was a Pole, I believe.

—For the record, Mr. Chairman, the General Walter, the man known in Spain as General Walter is in reality Karol Swierczewski, a Polish national. I'm not sure I pronounced it right.

—General Walter was a Polish volunteer, the same as I was an American volunteer. We also had German anti-Nazis, anti-fascist Italians, French, British, Scotch, Irish, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech and a dozen other nationalities—all volunteers.

—Did you know this General Walter?

—I believe I saw him once.

—Do you know where he is now?

—Of course not.

—Would it interest you to know that he is at present the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Red Army?

—Well, good for him! He was a good officer in 1938. I guess he's a better officer now.

—Did you hear what I said?

—Certainly. (Pause). What did you say?

—Polish *Red* Army.

—I'm not aware that that's its correct title, Mr. Chairman, but what's that got to do with *me?* I'm here in America, not in Poland. That was 1938. This is 1947.

—I'll tell you what it has to do with you, Mr. Blau. This committee has evidence that you were a Commonist in Spain, that you were a Commonist infiltrating the American Army, that you're a Commonist now. *That's* what it's got to do with you!

Lang heard loud laughter coming over the radio and the entire proceedings came to sudden life. He hadn't really recognized Ben's voice before. The laugh he recognized. He had heard it only a year before, when Ben had that fantastic argument with Wilhelmina Patton.

—You think this's funny, Mr. Blau?

—Mr. Chairman, I think it's *tragic.* I think you take me for an idiot, and you take the American people for idiots, too. That's what's basically wrong with people like you.

—In the American Army, Mr. Blau . . .

—Here . . .

There was a sound of metal clinking on wood and Lang, Anne and Peggy O'Brien all looked up as though they expected to see something.

—What's that?

—That's a medal the Army of the United States pinned on me in a base hospital in Germany. Two years ago. I return it to the Army through this committee. You've defiled it.

—Just a minute . . .

—You've spit on me and all my comrades left behind in Germany and, yes, in Spain, who *thought* they were fighting to destroy fascism. I don't mind telling you I'm pretty sore, and if that's subversive, make the most of it!

(The spectators burst into wild applause and the chairman rapped for order.)

—The room will be cleared if this demonstration continues! I'm aware—the committee's aware that there's a Commonist claque in this room whose purpose it is disrupt this hearing! (Pause.)

—Now Mr. Blau, nobody has said anything about your war record, but let's get down to brass tacks here. You're a grown man and an intelligent one . . .

(Silence.)

—Let's be frank with each other. You've been pretty blunt in your opinion of this committee. We'll be blunt with you. I don't—the committee don't deny that you fought for the United States or that your conduct wasn't correct. But between you and me, man to man, wasn't your conduct—didn't it— I mean, didn't the fact that the United States and Russia were allies in that war . . .

—You insult me, Mr. Congressman, and if you were to say a thing like that to me in your capacity as a private citizen—(Loud booing, drowned out by loud applause, drowned out by the banging of a gavel.)

—That's *enough!*

—*You* started this! I enlisted the day after Pearl Harbor.

—You're under oath here . . .

—I'm under oath and I swear before the American people, to whom I'm answerable, and not to *you*—that my private opinions are my own to express or conceal, as I choose. Number two—my allegiance is to the Constitution of the United States and *not* to its public servants when they try to destroy it. Number three—I have no greater allegiance than to what will benefit the majority of our people, not the minority, and I make up my own mind . . .

—Never mind the speech, sir . . .

—You brought me here and you're going to listen to me . . .

—We're not obliged to listen to you, sir, when you vilify the elected representatives of the American people! (Applause.)

—Who elected you? *I* didn't! I wouldn't vote for any one of you for dog-catcher. But with a little research I could tell you

who elected every *one* of you, where the money came from, and there isn't a child in the country over twelve . . .

—The witness is excused.

—*Why* am I excused? Don't you want me to testify before this committee?

—You've testified.

—I haven't even started, sir. I tell you *this* . . .

—The witness's excused. Please leave the stand and . . .

—I'll leave when I've finished . . .

—Officers, remove this man from the stand . . . (Loud booing and applause.)

—There will *never* be an American fascism, even if you wrap it in fifty American flags and call it a thousand percent Americanism . . . unless the people . . . are . . . let me *go* . . .

A roar of mingled booing and applause burst from the radio and the announcer's voice came on, oleaginous, soothing, saying, "The witness, Ben Blau, has been removed from the witness stand by police and is being ejected from the room. He's flailing his arms. He's . . . The chairman is pounding for order . . . nothing like this . . .

Lang snapped off the radio and started to pace up and down the room. Anne got up and left and he didn't notice it. He came over to Peggy's desk, took a pencil and on a pad wrote: *Draw* $100 *cash from wall safe, place plain envelope, deliver Blau at home—you got address—stay to see he personally gets it. Don't say where came from or identify self.*

He looked at Peggy, who had one eyebrow cocked. She nodded and rose from her desk and went toward the original Van Gogh on the opposite wall.

Lang paced a moment more. How *did* they know I'd joined in 1939? his mind said. Then he knew immediately: *Morton,* the head-shrinker. That night I was at Peggy's and got stinking and looked for Ben's address and couldn't find it and called Everett and insisted on going over. Of course. Can't remember half what I said, but *that* I remember saying. I remember. God damn the son of a bitch to hell! I must have realized immediately that I'd said too much. *That's* why I've never gone back to him again. Instinct. What to do? Nothing, you fool, you brainless idiot!

He walked out of the study without looking at Peggy. Anne was sitting in front of the piano, her fingers resting lightly on the keys, staring at the Hugo Wolff song on the piano rack.

She half turned, looked up at him. "You didn't tell them anything about him, did you, Frank?"

"Tell them? Who? Of course not."

"How did they find out about him?"

"How should *I* know? Oh," he said, "they knew about him. They dug up a piece I wrote about him when he was wounded in Germany, that the Army killed. Read it to me. They have access to G2 files, I guess."

"Then it was because of you . . ."

"No it wasn't because of me! An accident. A coincidence. They asked if he recruited me. I told them no. I told them I'd never met him in the party."

"But the article?"

"I couldn't very well deny I wrote it! You heard them. They know plenty about him."

"What else did *you* tell them?"

"I told them *nothing!* God damn it, Anne," he said, his voice rising, "what the hell do you think I *am,* a stool-pigeon!"

"Not so loud," she said, dropping her own voice. "That woman."

"What do you mean, *that woman?*" he mimicked her.

"I saw you looking at her," she said, her voice low.

"So *that's* what's eating you?"

"Lots of things are eating me, Frank. But mostly, now, what's going to happen to Ben."

"Why should anything happen to him?"

She didn't answer. She looked at him with unconcealed contempt and suddenly the blood rushed into his neck and face and he shouted at her, or maybe it was the alcohol that shouted.

"Which side are *you* on, you barren bitch—his or mine?"

3

December 10, 1947

Ben left the courtroom propelled by a U.S. marshal and a cop and stood for a moment in the corridor, bewildered and wondering what to do. He was joined almost immediately by Sam Tabatchnik, who was shaking his head. Then Sue appeared, Dave Bennett and a few other people.

An old man came up to him and said, "Young man, I want to shake your hand," shook it, nodded his head and went away. A middle-aged woman approached, her face livid, and said in a low voice, "The day is coming, the day of vengeance!"

Ben looked at her and Sam and Sue stared and she continued, her voice shaking with rage. "We will rid the nation of vermin like you; we will cut you out of our bodies like a cancer. Christ-killer!"

"Thank you," Ben said mildly and the woman stood there a

moment, then turned suddenly and almost ran down the corridor.

"You were wonderful," said Sue and threw both arms around him, kissed him on the cheek. Over her shoulder, Ben said, "No, I wasn't. I can tell by Sam's face."

"No point stewing about it now," said Sam with a sudden smile.

"Why? What's wrong?" said Sue, her face creased with anxiety.

"I guess I walked into their trap," Ben said. "Answered some questions I shouldn't have." He saw Sam nod his head and then Dave Bennett said, "Ben, you better get down to the office if you want to make the deadline."

Ben was puzzled for a moment. "You mean you want me to cover my own hearing?"

Dave smiled. "Who could do it better?"

Ben grinned. "You trust me to tell the truth about myself?"

"Within limits," said Dave. "But don't worry, Johnny'll read copy on you. I've got to cover the balance of this thing. If anything breaks I'll call in a bulletin."

Sue was staring at Ben and he suddenly flipped. "Mr. Bennett," he said, " I want you to meet Sue Menken."

"Hiya, Sue," said Dave, taking her extended hand.

Sam Tabatchnik said, "Excuse me. I've got another client coming up." Then, to Ben, "Call me in a couple days, will you? We've got to talk over certain things, and I've got to get a transcript."

"OK," said Ben, "and thanks." Sam shrugged and went back into the courtroom and Dave Bennett said, "See you two later," and followed him.

"What did Sam mean?" said Sue. "You told the truth."

"We'll cross the truth when we come to it," Ben smiled and said, "How'd you get the morning off?"

"I'm indisposed," she said with a dead pan.

"Oh?"

"But I've recovered now. I'll go back and earn a day's pay."

"Exploiting the boss again, I see."

"You could meet me for dinner, if you want."

"I want."

She looked at him dubiously and said, "I'm not so sure you do, Mr. Blau."

"Then I *don't* want," Ben snapped. "What're you making hostility with me for?"

"Making hostility?" said Sue with arched brows. "What kind of an expression is that?"

"Something I learned from Francis Lang."

"I hope you didn't learn anything else from him," she said, and when he was about to protest, she said, "I'll give you a buzz at the office later, or you can call me at the store."

"I'll do that," he said, offering to kiss her. She withdrew slightly and he was surprised. She looked him in the eyes and said, "From now on, I'm playing hard to get."

"How come?"

"I saw a movie the other night. It said you get results that way."

"I'll walk you to the bus," he said.

"Don't bother. I'm going to grab a bite first . . ." her eyes widened slightly. "Alone."

"OK, Miss Garbo," he said, turned on his heel and left the courthouse. He was both hurt and puzzled but by the time he got to the bus he decided to dismiss the thing from his mind till they met that evening. Plenty of time to work this one out, and hadn't he said himself . . .

How would he write the lead? he wondered, sitting in the bus. Write it straight, his mind told him. Never mind the heroics. You're not the important figure in this equation even if they do cite you for contempt and bring you to trial.

He stared absently out the window of the bus and thought, How dirty New York is! What a filthy city it is, and how I love it! Father used to love it, too; used to say he wouldn't live any other place in the world even if you gave it to him.

For the thousandth time since 1929 Ben regretted the fact that he had never had a chance to resolve his differences with his father. What an ambivalent relationship it had been! He loved the man, loved him so much as a small boy that it still ached almost physically to think of it. And at one and the same time he had hated almost everything his father believed in! How do you explain a thing like that?

And how to explain the fact that Leo had accepted almost all his father's ideas and put them into practice? "One son I want to be a business man," Daniel Blau had said. "One to be a lawyer." Leo was nine years older and had chosen the law even before he was through high school. But the very word business made Ben sick to his stomach.

The father had tried to indoctrinate the boy. He had taken him to the small factory he owned in Hoboken, New Jersey, and Ben watched the men making paper boxes. It was a hot summer, he recalled. They worked in their undershirts, dripping with sweat. Over and over they performed the same mechanical motions, like the very machines they operated. (Years later, in Barcelona, when Ben saw Chaplin's *Tiempos Modernos,* he realized for the first time how great a genius Charlie was.)

The workers were sallow and undernourished or flabby with fat. The factory was ancient, dirty; the windows had not been washed in years and the floor was made of splintered wood. And

Ben and his father drove back to the city, riding over on the ferry in a comfortable touring car to a comfortable home on Riverside Drive and lots to eat, clean clothes and easy living.

"You've got to learn the value of a dollar," Daniel Blau used to say, but somehow Ben was sure he made a separation in his mind between his son's education in the value of money and the men who worked for him and made the Riverside Drive apartment, the long summer vacations in the Adirondacks, the touring car and the easy living possible.

The elder Blau speculated in the market. He bought cotton "futures" (Ben used to wonder what they were; they seemed to be nothing but slips of paper at the time). He used to bring diamond jewelry home to Mama and once he brought a five thousand dollar lavalliere, hidden in a box of candy and said, "Sarah, I want you to try this new brand I bought today," and stood beaming as she opened the box. (He brought a box of candy every Saturday, or a bouquet of flowers, as long as he lived.)

As he got out of the bus on Twelfth Street and started to walk, Ben remembered, that was the very year, the year I was shipping out in the *McKeesport* and used to pull in every five weeks, stay in the apartment for five days, then sail again. And he remembered the glittering jewels in their bed of cheap chocolate and the ship he had just left, the cockroaches running wild in the crew's galley when he turned to for the graveyard watch, and took the napkin off the sandwich the messboy had left for him next to the coffee urn.

And a year later, when he had left the sea and was working on the *World* and was sound asleep, he heard the shot. It was unmistakable, even if you had never heard a pistol before. He sprang awake, snapped on the bedlight and his mother suddenly stood there in the door, in her nightgown, her hands clasped before her.

"Ben," she said, and her face was as white as the gown. "Go look. I'm afraid."

"Where?" he said, stumbling from the bed.

"In the kitchen, I think," she said and collapsed on the chair in his room.

He ran to the kitchen and pushed the swinging door, and he saw him. The kitchen clock said two-fifteen, the light was lit, there was a glass of milk on the kitchen table and a piece of paper and his father's gold-filigreed fountain pen.

And on the floor, his brains and blood splattered all over the stove and the ice-box and a terrible gaping hole in the top of his head. Ben recoiled and picked up the piece of paper. All it said was: *I am a failure. Forgive me if you can. Say kaddish. Papa.*

Ben dropped the sheet of paper and turned and saw his mother

in the hallway and moved toward her. "Don't come in, Mama," he said, pushing her gently into the hall and to her room, where he sat her on the edge of the bed she had shared with her husband for twenty-nine years. She was wringing her hands, her eyes dry, her face distorted as though someone had twisted it between enormous, powerful hands.

Ben picked up the phone on the wall and when the operator answered he asked for a number, and when he heard the sleepy voice, he said quietly, "Leo. It's Ben. Come . . ."

But what if he had lived? Ben thought as he pushed the button for the elevator in the building and waited for the operator to bring the ancient cage down. What if he had lived through the Depression, lost his little factory, been forced to hire out his labor to others, moved from Riverside Drive, sold the car, sold the overstuffed furniture and the fine clothing?

What if, side by side with millions, he had been forced to grapple with the faceless "crisis" which the newspapers blamed on everything—from the "inexorable law of supply and demand" to the sunspots? If all around him, he had seen other good men and women, eager and anxious to work, unable to find work—for what reason?

What if he had seen—through his own eyes and through his mind and heart—as I saw it and heard it and felt it in 1929 and 1930, covering the unemployed demonstrations for the *World,* visiting the relief offices and the breadlines and the Hoovervilles, and the homes of those who were without jobs, turning the drunks and the suicides and the murders out of desperation into copy? What if he had *gone* to the employment offices in 1931 and 1932 (as I did) and found no employment, and asked questions, listened to the people talk in '33 and '34 and '35, what then?

Would he have discovered that death was *not* preferable to the loss of money? Would he have finally understood my distaste for his copy-book maxims and his twisted values? Would he have realized why I left high school rather than contemplate going into his business, why I bummed the country, sailed the Atlantic? Would he have come to believe that my yen to write was something more than a "hobby" and more worthy of respect?

Ben was still pondering these questions as he sat down to the typewriter in the city room and, remembering that he was hungry, sent Joyce, who handled the morgue, out for a hamburger and coffee. He rolled the paper into the machine and started automatically to write:

NEW YORK, December 10, 1947—The witch hunting Committee on Un-American Activities this morning "extended the

scope of its inquiries" into the realm of the so-called "free press."

Significantly enough, the first victim of its new inquiry was Ben Blau, staff writer for *The Daily Worker,* veteran of the International Brigades and World War II.

Blau was subjected to a barrage of "have-you-stopped--beating-your-wife" questions, "answer-yes-or-no," in what was an obvious attack on the right to hold minority opinions and to express them in print . . .

Ben stopped writing. This was no good at all and it was a mistake for Dave Bennett to have asked him to cover the story. He was feeling self-conscious. The phone rang and he picked it up.

"Ben?" said Dave. "You're a celebrity. The committee has just announced that it isn't satisfied with your testimony, but will go into a huddle with itself and decide what to do about you."

"Says which?" said Ben.

"Dunno," said Dave. "Sam seems to think it certainly means a contempt citation if the House of Representatives goes along."

"Great!" said Ben. "I've been working full time for less than a month. You better find yourself another boy."

"Go on," said Dave. "You know these things take years . . ."

Peggy O'Brien had deposited the plain envelope with the typed message inside and the words *Mr. Ben Blau* typed on the outside, in the mailbox outside the door of the rooming house.

She stood for a while in the vestibule until she felt conspicuous, then she started to walk slowly up and down the block, keeping one eye on the house. She was annoyed as hell at the mission Zav had sent her on.

"Don't leave the place till you see him pick it up," he had said. "No matter *what* time it is. You can hand it to him when he comes in or leave it in the mail box if there is one, but I have to be sure he gets it."

What the hell did he take her for anyhow, one of those messenger girls the studios had who wore tight pants and pedaled their ass around the lot all day on a bicycle, carrying scripts and interoffice memoranda in a wire basket?

Whenever the waiting got to be too much of a bore, she began to wonder about Blau and what he looked like. The guy had sounded pretty tough on the radio and she had developed some curiosity about him, but not really enough to spend all night waiting—Zav or no Zav.

Why the hell couldn't Zav have delivered the money himself if he admired the guy so much and wanted to help him? Must be I

was wrong about him, she thought; must be he's one of them himself, in spite of what he told me.

She wondered what the priest would think of all this, the one who had received her confession the morning Zav appeared before the committee for the second time. He had a nice voice and sounded sort of young. Maybe I should go to church more often, she thought, like the Father said.

Maybe I should start looking out for Number One again. That Annie had her eye on you this morning. *She* knows. And if Zav is going to get all wound up in this sort of mess, who knows what might happen?

If only Eddie Warner had the loot Zav has, she thought with a sigh, but all he's got is what I need, that's all. In bed. And I need the loot more than I need the bed. Beds are a dime a dozen, and what goes with them too, for that matter.

She had about decided to give it up for the night and tell Zav he hadn't come home when she saw a man and a young woman coming up the street. She waited. She was standing in the vestibule of the rooming house, and now she leaned against the wall in what she felt was a nonchalant manner.

The couple came right up the steps and into the vestibule, with the man taking out his keys and reaching automatically into his mailbox (a fairly new tin box) nailed on the wall inside. He took the envelope out, then noticed her.

"Can I help you?" he said and his voice was low and sexy, Peggy thought. She saw the girl look at her with an appraising glance, and she said, "No thanks. My friend's late, is all."

He nodded and the two of them went inside. She waited till the sound of their feet had dissolved into silence, then she pulled her coat around her and felt her aching legs nearly give way as she started down the stoop. Wierd looking bird, she thought. But he has nice eyes. A regular pair of matzoth-faces. She shrugged.

"That was a pretty girl," Ben said as he climbed the stairs with Sue.

"Blau, the Seeing Eye."

Ben let her into the room, snapped on the light. "Excuse me," he said as he opened the envelope.

Inside there were five brand new twenty dollar bills and a small piece of white stationery on which were typed the words: *From an admirer.*

He stared at Sue, holding out the money and the note, and she looked at both and stared at him. "What do you make of *this,* Dr. Watson?" he said.

"What do *you* make of it, Holmes?"

"Well," he said, "let's see. By a process of deduction, it certainly isn't anybody on the committee."

"Brilliant, Holmes!"

"I give up."

"You give up awful easy, Holmes."

"But you don't, do you?"

"No. But there comes a time, Sherlock, and this is the time. Nothing's less important," she said, "than which of your countless admirers sent you a hundred bucks. Enjoy it in good health. What *is* important is that one of your admirers is taking leave of you."

"Which one?"

"One guess."

"Rita Hayworth."

"Try again. You're *hot!*"

"You."

"Right the first time," she said.

"Why?"

"Didn't you say you didn't love me? No more than a month ago? *"Don't!"* as he approached her and tried to put his arms around the point, but seeing you in action today convinced me."

"I don't follow you."

"That's my beef, Blau, as we union gals say. You don't. But I saw today that you don't need *anyone*. You can take care of yourself."

"Cut out the crap and get down to cases," he said.

"That's what I'm going to do, Ben," she said, and she said, *"Don't!"* as he approached her and tried to put his arms around her. "I'm not hungry. I just ate."

"You don't have to rub it in."

"I don't mean to, brother," she said. "But I'm serious. You were dead right. I need more than you're giving me. I'm taking off. Now."

"Why?"

"I just explained it in words of one syllable."

"But you said you loved me."

"Look, Ben," she said, "it's time for you to grow up. Like you told the committee. You're thirty-seven years old but you don't seem to realize there are other people in the world besides you."

"That's ridiculous!" he said. "What the hell do you think I'm doing with my life?"

"I'm damned if I know," she said, pacing back and forth as he watched her. "You're one of those people who are so wonderful on a political level that you practically don't exist on any other."

"What's that supposed to mean?" he said.

"Only this. You're so much in love with The *People* that you don't have any love left for a person."

"That's a lie!"

"Didn't you tell me yourself you don't love me?"

"Does that prove I couldn't love anyone?" he said, moving toward her. Her body stiffened. "I don't want you to leave me and I won't let you."

She laughed. "Now you sound like a B-movie."

"But I need you, Sue."

"This is *so* sudden," she said. "And what's worse, it's not true. And even if it were true, I want somebody who *more* than needs me. Call me up some time when you get over Ellen Gross."

This hurt, and the whole conversation was so close to what had happened to him in 1942 with Ellen that he wondered if it weren't exactly true; if Sue hadn't described him accurately. This was a concept it was impossible for him to accept.

"Very funny," he said.

"Then *laugh,*" she said, a sob in her throat, grasped the knob and was out the door.

4

December 1938 - *February* 1939

The *Paris* reached New York before Christmas in bitter weather. It was the roughest crossing Ben could remember experiencing on the North Atlantic, even in mid-winter. The ship was on her beam's end half the time and the guys didn't even have the pleasure of seeing the sour expression on the scab waiters' faces. Most of them didn't eat from one shore to the other.

All the other passengers were off the ship before nine in the morning, but the veterans were held aboard till after noon. They heard from reporters who came to interview them that there was a huge crowd outside the pier waiting to welcome them. The wind was blowing a gale.

A tall guy with a PRESS card in his hatband elbowed his way through the mob in the third-class saloon and grabbed Ben by the lapel.

"Blau?" he said. "Folsom of the *Telegram*. Glad to see you're alive."

"Thanks," said Ben. "So am I."

"Listen. The managing editor asked me to find you and get you to write a series of feature articles."

"No crap?"

"About Spain. You know. Color stuff. Why you joined up, what it was like, all that sort of stuff. Can do?"

"Like rolling off a log," said Ben. This was more than he had dreamed of. This was an entrée back into the newspaper business, and all the way home on the ship he had been wondering what he would do and how he would get started again.

"Better write one piece and an outline of the balance," Folsom said. "Say five altogether."

"Any deadline?"

"He didn't say, but if I were you I'd get the stuff in soon, while you guys are still hot copy."

Ben nodded.

"I admired what you did, Blau, even if a lot of the guys thought you were a Red or something." Folsom added.

"Thanks twice," said Ben and Folsom disappeared in the crowd. A man wearing a uniform appeared and finally managed to be heard over the mob. He told them all to go up to the first-class saloon, and when they were there they were lined up and the Immigration inspectors took each passport, compared its photograph with the man holding it, then said, "You'll get it back later."

They didn't get them back. In fact they never got them back at all. But at the moment their conversation on that score was idle enough. A few speculations about whether or not they could possibly be prosecuted for "misuse" of the passport, in view of the Neutrality Act, were drowned out by the excitement of the return.

Joe Kominsky, who was sometimes called Philadelphia Lawyer by the others, said it was ridiculous. Sure, the passport was stamped NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL IN SPAIN, but they hadn't used it to travel in Spain, had they? They'd used it to travel to France.

Then someone pointed out that later passports were also stamped NOT VALID FOR TRAVEL TO OR IN ANY COUNTRY FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENLISTING IN THE ARMED FORCES OF THAT COUNTRY.

"Wouldn't stand up in court," said Joe authoritatively. "Besides," he said, "we're heroes, ain't we? You saw that cable Lang sent to FDR. There's a mob of three thousand people waiting for us right now outside on West Street."

There were easily three thousand people and as Ben came down the gangplank wearing the blue beret he had bought in Ripoll, he spotted his older brother Leo behind the white picket fence on the French Line pier.

Leo waved and Ben waved but the surging veterans swept him forward and they shouted at each other, "See you later!" "Come

to the house for dinner!" "I *will!*" Then Leo was lost and they were all on the cobbled street outside, a band struck up, horse cops appeared and they were herded into some semblance of a parade formation by Busch.

The Brigade flag and the American flag and even a Spanish Republican flag appeared at the head of the column and they marched through the side streets, winding eastward toward the Eternal Light in Madison Square, where they were going to lay a wreath in memory of the Americans who had died in other, more respectable wars.

Ben was nearly overcome with emotion all the way. The biting cold made tears run down his face but there would have been tears anyhow. People ran off the sidewalks to embrace him; total strangers, just as they had in Barcelona during that last parade. People cheered and shouted, and from the pier all the way to Fifth Avenue there were occasional figures, mostly men but sometimes women, standing silently at points where they would be sure to be seen. They held up placards that read: ABE FOSTER? or JIM O'CONNOR—LOST AT JARAMA? or WHAT HAPPENED TO TONY BONELLI? Some of the placards had enlarged photographs of the missing men on them and Ben saw one that merely had the photograph and a large question mark on either side of it . . .

When he got out at Seventy-Ninth Street and Broadway and started to walk toward Riverside Drive, he figured he ought to pull himself together. What was going to happen now would be exhausting and he was already exhausted. He hadn't slept the whole last night at sea but had sat up in the third-class saloon playing poker with Pellegrini and Busch.

When he rang the bell, he noticed that the *mezuzah* was still on the door-frame and wondered about it, for Leo no longer observed even the outward forms of the religion. The maid opened the door and he walked directly into the living room and there they were, standing in a straight line like bad actors in a bad play staged by an amateur director.

His mother Sarah, his sister Stella and her *nudnik* of a husband Phil, his brother Leo and his wife Belle and their two kids Danny and Sarah, named after their grandparents. All of them stood staring at him, then the scrimmage line broke up and rushed him all at once and there was a great deal of weeping and patting and hugging and wet kissing, and he remembered saying *"Mein Yiddishe Mama"* and patting her on the back while he hugged and kissed her, trying to overcome the shock of her appearance.

Then the group broke up and distributed itself around the room

and his mother sat in the wing chair, her hands clasped in her lap, and looked at him and didn't say another word, and the two kids wanted to know if he'd brought his gun back with him, and the *nudnik* laughed and said, "You got back just in time for the next war," which wasn't such a dumb remark after all, and Stella kept shaking her head from left to right as though she had a crick in the neck, and the kids rapidly lost interest in him, and Mama went to the kitchen to make the noodle soup with *matzoth* balls and the *kreplach* and the chicken with rice and put the *strudel* she had spent all morning rolling out into the oven.

"You bad boy," his mother said. "You thought you could hide the truth from your Mama." She shook her head and made a *tch*-ing sound. Then she laughed. "It was in all the papers about you. I nearly had a heart attack."

"Well, you came back," Leo said fatuously, sipping the sweet *Kümmel,* "and now what will you do?" He belched and said, "Excuse me. I took the day off from court, sent my partner. You remember Pevner? He's turned into a pretty good trial lawyer if I say so myself."

These were simple people who didn't understand, but Ben felt no condescension, furious as he could get at them at times, violent as they could be with him.

"Maybe now," Mama said, "you will keep out of bad company?"

"Have I been in bad company, Mama?"

She nodded and said, "Tch!" and added, "A good Jewish boy like you, *du megst zich shemen.*"

"Let him live," said Stella.

"He could of died," Mama said and her eyes overflowed with tears and Ben thought, what a pity that no matter how much I explain to her, she never understands, except that I'm a good Jewish boy and wouldn't harm a fly and what I do must be good even if it's bad. (The contradiction didn't seem to bother her.)

"Your father should be alive today," she said, sobbing quietly into her apron.

Leo lfited the *Kümmel* and said, *"L'chaim,"* and they all lifted their glasses and repeated the toast, and Ben said it in English, a toast he had always loved: "To *life!*"

Then Mama was gone into her kitchen with Stella and the *nudnik* and Belle was putting the kids to bed, which looked like an evening's job, what with all the excitement.

It was astonishing, Ben thought, how much Leo resembled Papa, even to the way he sits and moves and talks. Like his mother, Leo was much older than his age. He was thirty-seven and looked fifty,

what with his corporation and the lethargic way he moved and spoke.

"You'll stay with us, of course," he said.

"Till I find a place," said Ben. "Do you have a typewriter?"

"The *Globe* won't take you back?"

"I have a commission to write some articles for the *Telegram.*"

"Really?" said Leo. "That's good. How old are you—twenty-eight? It's not too late to learn a trade, you know. I could maybe even scrape up some money and put you in a little business."

Ben smiled. "Thanks, Leo, but I expect to get back onto a paper with these pieces."

"You're a bright boy, Ben. You mustn't let yourself drift forever." He hesitated and looked down at his hands and addressed them. (Ben wondered where Leo and Papa got the idea that writing was *not* a trade.)

"I suppose," he said, "that is... your ideas. They're the same."

"The same," said Ben, "only more so."

Leo looked up. "What do you mean?"

"I'm thinking of joining the Communist Party."

"You're *what?*" To Leo the statement was the equivalent of I'm thinking of committing suicide.

"That's right," said Ben. "I guess I've been a radical for a long time without knowing it. That is, without doing anything about it."

"You need a rest," Leo said with a sigh. "A month or so anyhow." He felt he must say something, humor his younger brother as one humors a drunk or a deranged person. "Ben," he said, "I don't like the society any more than you do. A lawyer learns a thing or two about the way the wheels go round."

"I should hope so."

"Fundamentally," he said, taking out a cigar and snipping off one end with Father's gold cigar-cutter, "I too look forward to a better life for everybody, when dog won't eat dog and people will love each other, like it says, but..."

Ben supplied the words that would have come after Leo had finished lighting the cigar. "...but you can't fight City Hall." Leo nodded.

"But you *can.*"

"You lost a war," Leo said, puffing.

"It's not over yet."

"It will be over soon, and it will be lost. A good cause. I said so myself even if I didn't approve of what you did. You think writing is important. You get yourself thrown off your paper. Who will hire you?"

"You miss the point."

"Political arguments we won't have, Ben my son," said Leo, as though he were his own father. "But I beg you not to do what you're thinking of doing."

"Why not?"

"I remember 1919. The Palmer Raids. Those people have never been popular in our country. Their ideas are foreign."

"This is almost 1939, not 1919."

"It makes no difference, Ben."

"Ideas aren't foreign, Leo. They have no nationality. Ideas are international. What was revolutionary yesterday is accepted today. Even in your own profession."

"Father used to say..." said Leo, but Ben wasn't really listening. His brother's appearance, his manner of speech and gesture, his ideas had carried him back to 1929. He remembered the day again and felt his throat thicken. (How his father had met a smart fellow from the South who had told him, "Dan, I want you to beg, borrow or steal every cent you can lay your hands on and buy that stock, and I give you my word of honor, by the end of the week you'll be a millionaire.")

"I remember," said Ben and they were silent and Ben remembered how his father had taken the advice—after all, the man was a shrewd operator and a good Jew, had made a pile for himself even if he had a rich wife in the bargain—and he had bought and the market had gone up and up and he had bought more and he had four hundred and seventy thousand bucks, all on paper of course, and then he had seven hundred and fifty thousand and then the bottom dropped out. 1929. Ben had heard the shot in the middle of the night...

A failure, good God, Ben thought now and tears sprang to his eyes and Leo leaned forward and said, "Something's wrong, Ben?" and Ben said, "I was thinking of Father."

Leo rose and came to his younger brother and said, "We had a good father, my son. You mustn't think wrong of him."

"Think wrong of him!" Ben almost shouted. "I adored him! He destroyed himself, do you remember?" Leo nodded.

"Do you remember *why* he destroyed himself! Can't fight City Hall! Why should he want to be a millionaire? We had plenty."

"I remember," Leo said.

"After I left home," said Ben, "I lived with people who didn't have what we had. I sailed with them in ships. I saw them struggling. Like swimming in molasses. I struggled with them. I saw what happened to them. I was one of them. I saw them lose their jobs. I lost my own. Their poverty made no more sense to me than Papa killing himself. Do *you* think he was a failure?"

"Of course not, boy."

"But you can't fight City Hall?"

"How can you fight for something you'll never see?"

"Your children will see it. And mine, if I have any."

Leo shrugged. "I'm older," he said. "I'm tired."

"You're lucky," said Ben with some bitterness. "You're either too young or too old to *act*."

"You see what you want to see."

"God damn it, Leo, I. . ."

Mama came into the room. "Fighting already?" she said and both men moved to her and clasped her in their arms and said, "Nothing, Mama, nothing."

Leo said, "Ben was telling me, excited, something he saw in Spain. A bad thing. Human suffering."

"Ach!" said Mama. "There's too much suffering already without we should make wars."

"There will always be wars," Leo said and Ben kicked him in the ankle and he laughed.

"You should excuse it," he said, and shuddered.

"Leo," Mama said. "Are you catching cold? You shivered."

"A goose walked over my grave," Leo said. . .

Ben started immediately to "write himself out of" Leo's house. He had knocked out the first article of the series the *Telegram* wanted and made brief outlines of four others, and during the holiday week he went down to the newspaper, as excited as a cub on his first assignment. Poetic justice, he thought. The *Globe-Times* had fired him because of Spain and the *Telegram* would take him on for the same reason!

In the city room the man in the slot directed Ben to the glassed-in office of the managing editor, a pleasant-looking man who rose immediately when Ben announced his name and said, "Have you got the stuff?"

Ben handed it over and the editor sat down, started to read, then looked up and said, "Excuse me while I read this, will you? You boys did a great job over there, all right."

It was *good* to be in a city room again. There was an air of vitality and excitement, even if it didn't resemble in the slightest the moving picture version of a newspaper office. And he felt that if he were to be taken on, he'd know better how to work in such an office than he had before. You worked with the material in hand, that's what you did. You didn't try to make it over to suit your own understanding of the world.

"Blau," the managing editor said, "this is fine copy. Couldn't be

better." Ben nodded. He couldn't trust himself to say anything and he had a funny feeling that if he spoke his voice would break like an adolescent boy's.

"Trouble is," the man said, "it's not exactly what we need."

After a moment Ben managed to say, "What do you need? I could work it over."

"Oh, *you* know," the editor said, smiling with embarrassment. "Color stuff. Romantic Spain. Adventure. *Señoritas* in bright *mantillas*. Maybe a love affair. Picturesque, you know."

"That's not the way it was," Ben said grimly. "It was a war. We're not adventurers. I didn't see a *mantilla* in the two years I was there. I didn't..."

"Don't get me wrong, Ben," the man said. "I know what it was all about. But this is highly political stuff, even if it *is* exciting. I never read a better piece than this place where you joined up. But the war's still on and we have a policy on controversial issues..."

Watch it! Ben said to himself.

"If you could give it the once-over-lightly treatment—instead of this... *you* know..."

"I know," said Ben, shaking the man's hand briefly. "If I could have given it the once-over-lightly I'd probably still be on the *Globe-Times*. But thanks."

"No harm in trying," the editor beamed. "Good luck to you, boy."

In the next couple of weeks Ben tried to peddle the articles to the *New York Times*, the *Herald Tribune*, *Colliers*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harpers* and the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Life*. Everywhere he went he met with a cordial reception and a compliment. In every office he met with a rejection.

The *New Masses* bought the series for ten dollars an installment —all it could afford to pay, Joe North, the editor, said. And Ben took this as an omen. He hunted up Tony Pellegrini and repeated the request he had made on the train to Le Havre. Tony said, "OK, comrade," and Ben thought, I'm beginning a new life.

He found a room on Pineapple Street in Brooklyn. He had a few bucks in the bank left over from the money the *Globe* had deposited for him while he was in Spain, and some which Leo had "loaned" him.

Ben finally got a letter which gave him the date and address of a meeting in a private home. It was two days off and he went to it in a state of enormous excitement.

The meeting was in the apartment of a newspaper man whose by-line Ben had seen, and the reception couldn't have been more cordial. Everyone put himself out to express his pleasure at meeting

Ben and welcoming him into the organization. Everyone expressed pride at having a man like Blau attached to the branch.

Then the meeting continued, apparently as planned. There was an "educational" based on Chapter 4 of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had just been published in English. There was a discussion of current events, including the continuing struggle in Spain, in which Ben found that everyone deferred to his opinions. A party was planned to raise money for the *Daily Worker.* A girl sold some literature. Dues were collected. A short good-and-welfare point involved negotiations going on between the New York Newspaper Guild and the publisher of the *New York Times,* and a time and place for the next meeting were set. It had been suggested that Ben might want to take a course at the Workers School, but one of the comrades felt that this would scarcely be necessary in view of the new member's obvious development and record in Spain.

Ben was disapointed. Is *that* all there was to it? he wondered. A discussion group? A study group? What did you expect, he asked himself, a conspiracy working under the sort of underground conditions you saw reflected in the old Soviet movies about the days before the October Revolution? Did you expect someone to assign you to a machine-gun squad? What *did* you expect?

In mid-January Ben saw Busch again and some of the other guys at a huge roving picket-line that tied up Times Square one night as the theaters were letting out. It was a spectacular affair. There must have been nearly a thousand people on the line (LIFT THE EMBARGO! ARMS FOR SPAIN! AIRPLANES FOR SPAIN!) with almost as many placards, but while the spirit was high, Ben knew it was a hopeless gesture.

Barcelona was under siege and the city fell on the twenty-sixth of the month. Four days latter the *flojo* President of the Republic, Manuel Azaña, fled to France and what he had to say to the newspapers did the cause no good at all. *Que importa?* Azaña had been a defeatist from the start and Ben realized it when he had interviewed him, but he was still the official voice of the Republic.

That month, too, after the second party meeting he attended, Ben went to a "brawl" given for some of the returned veterans. It was held in an apartment rented by a movie critic on the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle.* (There was even a Spanish poster on the wall.) It was the third such party Ben had attended, and he decided that he would never go to another the minute he entered the living room. They were dismal.

A few of the guys always got plastered and insisted on fighting Belchite all over again, and there was a simulated air of gaiety and

celebration that did not sit well with him, considering the daily news from Spain. What the hell was there to celebrate?

Many a night Ben felt that it would have been better for him to have died in Spain, together with Joe Faber. (*Die 'n pieces f'r what I b'lieve,* Zav said.) He had frightful nightmares in the furnished room on Pineapple Street, dreams in which he would see Joe again, standing among the broken stones and blasted shards of artillery shells on Hill 666. It was always night in the dream and it was silent as death, and Ben was always sleeping on the hard earth, rolled in a blanket and conscious of being cold to the bone.

And he always woke up—in the dream—hearing Joe's voice saying, "Ben... Ben..." And then, out of the starless night Joe came forward, his arm extended, one finger beckoning, saying, "Come... come..." There was a smile on his face.

Ben always awoke with a scream, his skin ice-cold, and sat in the chair by the window for the rest of the night. Despite all the men he knew, despite the family that loved him, he was lonelier than he had ever been in his life, even standing the graveyard watch in the crow's nest of a trans-Atlantic freighter.

The very day he went to the party, he had received the fifty bucks Joe North promised him for the articles. So, for the moment, he was feeling better when he entered the apartment in Grace Court and let himself be absorbed into the noisy crowd. He sat on a couch at the far end of the room with a highball in his hand, and sitting next to him was a young woman who smiled at him and said, "You're Ben Blau." He nodded.

"Ellen Gross," she said. "I met you during the seamen's strike the year the NMU was formed. Remember?"

"I remember the strike, Ellen, but not you. Forgive me."

"No reason why you should. I was just one of those gals who was running around town, scrounging up food to feed the strikers at the soup kitchen. You were at the Brooklyn strike headquarters one day for your paper."

"Good girl," he said. "You have quite a memory."

"They gave me an honorary picket-card," she said, and he grinned at her. "You must have been a *very* good girl."

Irrelevantly, or so it seemed to Ben, she said, "That was before I was married."

"Oh," said Ben, aware that he was curiously disappointed. His face showed it, too, and Ellen laughed and said, "I'm not married any more."

"Quick work."

"You don't know the half of it," she said. "I've got a baby, too. Eighteen months old. Named Stella."

"My sister's name is Stella," Ben said, feeling like an idiot, but Ellen wasn't listening. She was fishing in her purse. She brought out a snapshot and showed it to him.

"Cute," said Ben and both of them burst into laughter.

"No, she really *is*," said Ben. "I usually get off on the wrong foot in conversations like this. I'm just as likely as not to say it looks like Charles Laughton."

"All babies look like Charles Laughton," Ellen said and Ben said, "This conversation's getting nowhere fast."

"What would you like to talk about?" she said. "Spain?" He shook his head. "I didn't think so," she said. "You don't look like the type." She nodded toward the other side of the room. "Those guys are back at Jarama."

"Maybe we could find something to talk about if we got out of here."

"Maybe we could," she said. "I've got another hour. My mother's sitting with the baby."

So they went to Joe's, just off Borough Hall, and Ben splurged part of the fifty bucks and ordered steak sandwiches and beer. He liked the looks of the young woman sitting opposite. She was built like a woman, with deep breasts, long dark hair and brown eyes.

"You don't look too well, Ben," she said.

"I'm tired."

"You don't look very happy, either."

"Who could be happy?" said Ben.

She shook her head and he heard himself say, "Why did you break up with your husband?"

"It's a long story. I'm sure you don't want it tonight."

"Forgive me for asking."

"It's all right," she said. "The question's natural. It's not easy for men and women to get along in this cockeyed society of ours. But we had some political differences as well."

"That's no good."

"What're you doing now, Ben?" she said and he suddenly found himself telling her the story of his life. It became very important for him to tell her, and as he told her it amazed him that she should laugh so often and so heartily.

"Is it *that* funny?" he said at one point. "I didn't realize it."

"Your father," she said. "The story about his changing his clothes three times a day, washing his hands so often."

"He was a good guy," Ben said. "Even if he really believed that a man was judged by the appearance he made. He had a heart as big as a house, and he always tipped his hat to pregnant women on the street."

"He *didn't!*" Ellen said and started to laugh all over again. "For Pete's sake, *why?*"

"I asked him once," Ben said, "and *he* said, 'She's going to be a mother.' That's the only explanation he ever gave."

"I'll bet you look like him," Ellen said and Ben nodded. "A little, the poor guy."

"Why poor guy?"

"Look at me."

"I'm looking. You have more character in your face than any man I've ever met."

Ben bowed. "That's a handy word, character. It's the male equivalent for what you mean when you say a girl has an interesting face." She laughed heartily.

Ben said, "You should laugh all the time, Ellen."

"Why?"

"Because when you laugh you're beautiful."

"Thank you, kind sir," she said. "My husband was always annoyed by my laugh. Used to call me The Laughing Hyena."

"The more I hear about *him,*" said Ben, "the less I like him."

She did not reply to that but her face was suddenly serious and she said, "Walk me home, Ben. I can't keep Mother up all night."

5

February, 1939

In the next two weeks Ben saw a lot of Ellen. They went to the Brooklyn Museum together, walked the baby in Prospect Park, saw a couple of movies, including *Blockade* which Ellen had seen before but which was a terrific disappointment to Ben. (He ducked automatically when the guns started firing.)

They went to a great rally at Madison Square Garden where Francis X. Lang, just returned from France, was the featured speaker. Twenty-two thousand people jammed the place and it was impossible to believe that with the kind of flaming anger the meeting generated, the high level of enthusiasm and the fighting spirit—which had found their counterparts in similar meetings all over the world for almost three years—that the Republic of Spain was on its death-bed.

Lang, who looked thin and harried (even from the balcony), made a spectacular speech. Anyone listening would have thought

the man had had years of platform experience, but actually this was the first large meeting he had ever addressed. He spoke extemporaneously, referring to a filing card on which there were no more than two or three notes, and he easily held the vast audience.

"We must lay the blame for this crime," he said, "precisely where it belongs: on the Nazi and fascist regimes of Germany and Italy, and on the ruling circles of finance capital in Great Britain, France and the United States.

"No greater fraud has ever been perpetrated on the peoples of the world than the lie created by Hitler and his mob with the active collaboration of the Vatican and its sinister international organization, that this is a struggle between Catholicism and Communism.

"Mark my words: the world is marching to Armageddon and what we have seen in Spain—with all that it holds of horror and cold-blooded atrocity—will be repeated upon the capital cities of the so-called democratic world!

"When Dolores Ibarrúri said: *'Vale mas morir de pie que vivir de rodillas'*—which I will translate for the benefit of the FBI men and any other native fascists in the audience—'It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees'—she was giving us something more than a slogan; she was giving us a guide and a standard to rally the decent people of the earth to the everlasting struggle between those who love life and those who luxuriate in death, between those who work for a living and those who merely consume what others have created for them.

"I say the time is *now!* I say the moment is *here!* I say that unless we carry this standard into battle—everywhere in the world—our graves have already been prepared for us and are merely waiting to be occupied."

The silence in the great hall was total. Lang raised one arm and said quietly, "In the name of the American dead who sleep in Spain, in the name of the murdered civilians of Guernica, in the name of the anonymous subversive babies I have seen lying in rows drowned in their own blood on the streets of Barcelona and Madrid, of Almeria, Valencia and Aliante, in the name of the half-million tortured human beings I saw crossing the border into France two weeks ago, and in the name of the unborn in every nation of the so-called civilized world, I call on you—friends and comrades—to *fight!*"

Twenty-two thousand people came to their feet as one, and Lang stood alone in the white spotlight on the central platform, his arm raised and his fist clenched in the Popular Front salute...

On George Washington's birthday Ben walked across the Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan and started uptown. On his return from Spain he had thought he would never walk again, for he had surely walked enough in the past two years to last a lifetime, but the lifetime habit of taking long walks stayed with him and he even started to enjoy them again.

And he wanted to think that day. He wanted to think about Ellen, who had become very close and dear to him, and he wanted to think about his future. Find a piece of earth and sink roots. Where? When? How to do it?

It was obvious the commercial press would not use him. He wasn't exactly what was "needed." Joe North had told him there was no opening on the *Masses* and the *Daily* was fully staffed. He had started, in a tentative sort of way, to build a book out of the five articles he had written, but who would publish it if he could complete it? The state of the world, as events were unfolding in Europe, convinced him that there would be little peace for years to come.

A few bucks could be picked up from occasional articles for the *Daily* and for North, but the money he had saved was gone. The fifty bucks was gone, and what was needed was a job. North had offered to list Ben as one of the *New Masses'* panel of speakers, but this was a precarious living, a sporadic sort of thing at best.

It would be necessary to canvas the field, Ben decided, to visit all the unions that might conceivably need an editor and would be disposed to hire a man like Blau.

But for the moment he had decided that he would call on Francis Lang and take a chance that he was home. No phone number was listed in the book, but Ben had written down the address Anne Lang gave him that night in Le Havre—48 Bank Street. He wanted to talk to Zav, especially after his speech last week, and he knew that, lurking in the back of his mind, he was going to hit him for a loan.

A Negro maid answered the door and said she would see if Mr. Lang was in. He gave his name and walked self-consciously into the huge round living room with its sunken floor. There was a Steinway concert grand in one corner of the room and Ben noticed that a Bach score was spread out on the rack. There was an original Van Gogh, or what looked like one, hanging over the brick fireplace. The carpet, wall to wall, was so deep his feet made no sound, so he was startled when a voice behind him said, "Blau, *me cago en Dios!*"

Lang was wearing a pair of lounging pajamas and a dressing-gown, and a pair of heavy horn-rimmed glasses was perched in his dark hair, the bows resting just above his ears.

"Happy George's birthday," Lang said as they shook hands and he pushed a button somewhere, for the maid immediately reappeared and Zav said, "Something to drink, please, Emmy." He gripped Ben by one arm and led him to a wide davenport and practically shoved him into it.

"I couldn't have conjured up a better guest," he said. "I sort of expected to see you at the Garden last week."

"I was there," Ben said. "Couldn't get to you."

"Wasn't it terrific?" Zav said and Ben knew that he was referring not only to the entire meeting but specifically to his own performance on the rostrum.

"You were great," Ben said. "I never knew you could speak like that."

"Neither did I," said Zav. Ben noticed that he *was* a lot thinner than when he had seen him in Le Havre in December, and there was some gray in his sideburns that had not been there before.

"You've lost some weight," Ben said as the maid returned wheeling one of those things you saw in the movies, that had bottles and glasses all racked up and a large vacuum bowl full of ice-cubes.

"I've been ill," Lang said and winked at him. "*You* remember." He sat down, then got up immediately and said, "Wait a minute; there's something I want you to see."

He ran up the curving stairs from the foyer, taking them two at a time, and Ben made himself a whiskey highball and sat down on the davenport again. There must have been a thousand books in the room.

Lang reappeared almost immediately with long sheets of white paper in his hand and thrust them at Ben. "Galley proofs," he said. "The book will be out in about two months."

"You want me to read this now?"

"Just skim it," Zav said. "Get an impression. I know you're going to approve of it. It was written at white heat."

"What about the play?"

"I'm on the last act," Zav said, beaming. "Never worked so hard or so consistently in my life. Goes to show you, when you've got something to say it's no problem at all saying it. You just apply the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair and let it pour."

"Madrid Will Be—" said Ben. "That's a good affirmative title." He remembered the banners: *Madrid Será La Tumba del Fascismo.* He let his eyes run down the proofs, catching a paragraph here and there. He glanced up at Lang and saw him open a bottle of Coca-Cola, pour it into a glass filled with ice cubes.

"On the wagon," Zav said without being asked. "A month now.

No, more than a month. Alcohol is the opium of the people." He lifted his glass.

They laughed at that and were both silent for a time as Lang sipped the Coca-Cola as though he were enjoying it and Ben skimmed the proofs.

He read: *Spain was lost because the great democracies were so blinded by anti-communist passion that they fell easy prey to the lies of international fascism.* He looked up.

"Spain isn't lost yet," he said.

"Do you have any doubt?" Zav said, his face sober, whirling the ice cubes in his glass, then pouring another bottle. "I'm a sort of minor Cassandra in these matters." (Leo had said the same thing.)

"But it isn't."

"Publication's two months off," said Lang. "I'll lay you ten to one I don't have to change a word."

"I hope you'll lose, but in any event I'd never bet on a thing like that."

"Neither would I," said Zav. "Read on."

Spain was lost because it was possible for the Spanish, German and Italian fascists, working hand in glove with their opposite numbers in England, France and the United States of America to strangle a legally-constituted democratic nation. Let there be no mistake about it: there was never any danger of communism in Spain, although the Spanish Communist Party and the Communist parties of the world, thousands of whose members fought and died in Spain, gave an example of unselfish devotion which has no parallel in modern history.

Ben looked up. "It's strong stuff," he said. "But you'd better be careful writing things like this, Zav. And making speeches like that."

Lang laughed. "Why?"

"You can't print stuff like this."

"Oh, yes I can," Lang said. "But *you* couldn't, comrade."

"Why?"

"Everybody knows I'm no Communist," said Lang.

"A Communist is what he does," said Ben, thinking, And what do *I* do?

"*Claro,* but if it ever came to a showdown, I have a very good friend who lives in a big white house in the District of Columbia."

Ben laughed. "How *is* your friend these days?"

"Chipper as ever," said Lang. "I made him a full report when I got back. He was quite impressed. Admitted our policy has been a mistake from the word go, but..." Lang shrugged and grinned, and the grin was so shrewd an imitation of the original that Ben

had to laugh. All he needed was a long cigarette-holder to make the image complete.

"Have another drink," said Lang and Ben shook his head.

"How's your wife?"

"Fine, fine," said Zav. "She'll be back soon. You'll see her. She's been taking up the piano seriously, studies at the Juilliard these days."

"What's the name of your play?"

" 'Better to Die'," said Lang. "It's practically assured fall production, sight unseen. If Shumlin doesn't do it, The Theatre Guild will."

"I don't care for the title."

Lang leaned forward in his chair, one arm extended and said, "See if you like this one better."

He held something in his hand which he had taken out of his dressing-gown pocket, and Ben took it. It was a small book and Ben knew what it was before he opened it and read the words: COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE U. S. A. His own was just as new.

He stared at the title page with the assumed name on it and heard Lang say, "That's me," and kept staring at the book because he felt a curious embarrassment. He didn't know whether he approved of Lang's belonging to the party or not and thought automatically, Who the hell am I to approve or disapprove? I'm a newcomer myself.

Finally he looked up and handed the book back. *"Mazeltov,"* he said and Lang nodded and put the book back into his pocket. "It was the only logical thing to do," he said, "and I know you're the soul of discretion."

"Then why'd you tell me?"

"Oh," said Lang, "I *had* to tell you. I wanted you to know. You saw me at my worst; I wanted you to see me at my best. *You* know, working like mad, on the wagon, speaking my piece, joining the only organization in the world that's working for what I believe in." (He sounds just like me, talking to Leo, Ben thought.)

They were silent for a moment and then Lang said, "What're you up to these days, Ben?" It was the first time he had shown any interest in his visitor and Ben was aware of it.

"Looking for work," Ben said. "And, you should excuse the expression, I'm trying to write a book myself."

"Good," said Lang. "It'll be great."

"Who would publish it?" Ben asked. "The *Telegram* sent a man to the ship to ask me for a series of articles, then turned them down flat."

Lang pursed his lips. "You need dollars?"

"Well..." said Ben, "I could get some dough from the Friends of the Lincoln Brigade if I got real strapped but..." he let the sentence dangle off. He had wanted to broach the subject in his own way, but now he wasn't at all sure that he wanted a loan from Lang. It would be something like exploiting their comradeship, for one thing.

Lang had stood up and crossed the room. He picked up the phone, drew it on its fifteen-foot cord across the room to the davenport, sat down and winked at Ben. "Listen to this," he said and called a number.

When it answered he said, "Chadwick," then winked at Ben again.

After a moment, Zav said, "How *are* you, you dessicated codfish?" He waited for a reply, then said, "I'm working on them, have them back by the end of the week... How's that? Dry up a minute and let me talk." He covered the mouthpiece with his hand and said to Ben, "My editor, at Peabody Sons."

"OK, OK," he said into the phone. "I'm sending you a man. Name of Blau, Ben Blau. One of the Lincoln Battalion men. He's got a book..." Then after a pause, "I know. I know you're publishing my book, but that's a horse of a different color.

"Now *listen* to me." (Ben was terribly disturbed. He knew what Lang was up to and wanted to stop him immediately. He gestured at him but Zav deliberately ignored the gesture.) "Mine's not in the same class. This is a personal narrative Blau's writing. I've read part of it. It's *great*. You read about him. He's a character. Threw up his correspondent's job to enlist. It's a great story.

"I want you to grab this book and write a contract. A better book won't be written. What do you *mean* you can't publish two books about Spain! What the hell kind of an editor *are* you? You could publish fifty if they made money, couldn't you?... OK... OK... (He winked at Ben—a long, expressive wink). I'd put him on a weekly advance, or he'll spend it in riotous living. Sure, sure. Tomorrow. He'll be there and explain the whole thing to you, and, believe me, you're making no mistake. I'll stake my reputation on it and I'll get you a full page review in the *Times*. OK."

He hung up and shoved Ben with one hand. He laughed out loud. "I feel *wonderful*," he said. "How do you feel?"

"Awful," said Ben.

"It may take a week to put the contract through, but Chadwick'll do it. Till then, I'll make you an advance."

"Let's call it a loan," said Ben.

"If it makes you feel better," Lang said.

He went to a writing desk and started to write a check as the

door opened and Anne Lang came in, a roll of music under her arm. Ben stood up.

"Hel*lo,*" she said, coming to him. "*So* nice to see you, Ben."

"Thanks," he said, "you're looking well."

"I am well," Anne said. Her eyes went to her husband, then back to Blau, "and I'm happy, happier than I've been in a long time."

"That's good," said Ben.

"Hi, Annie," Lang said from the desk. "How'd it go?"

"Work, work," she said, "nothing but work. I wish my Dad had never made me study the piano."

Lang got up and Ben saw him fold the check and put it in the pocket of his dressing-gown. He came to Anne, kissed her on the mouth and said, "Emmy's in a stew again. Something about the caterer you've been dealing with."

"I'll take care of it," she said and turned to Ben. "You'll stay to dinner, won't you?"

"I wish I could," said Ben.

"Take a rain-check, then," she said. "I'll be right down." She started up the stairs and when Lang was sure she was out of sight he handed the folded check to Ben, who said, "Thanks. But the minute I get a check. . ."

"Forget it, will you?" said Zav. He glanced toward the stairs and said, "And don't say anything about it to Anne. She's always after me to save money. Money doesn't mean a thing to me."

He looked at Ben. "I wish you'd stay to dinner but I've got a hunch that romance calls."

"Posible que si, posible que no," Ben laughed. "How'd you know?"

"My woman's intuition," said Lang. "That makes the cheese more binding." His eyes twinkled. "I hope she's a little girl with black hair and big black eyes."

Ben laughed aloud, delighted that the guy had apparently got to the point where he could make a joke about it. "Don't make hostility with me," he said and Lang howled.

"Say goodbye to your wife for me," said Ben.

Zav saw him to the door, pounded him on the back and went back in. Ben walked two blocks before he had the courage to look at the check. It was for a hundred dollars and was made out to "Cash." That means he doesn't want my endorsement on it, Ben thought. Well, he's right at that. Christ! he thought, it must be wonderful to be so influential.

Suddenly he stopped dead. There was something in his mind. Some question he knew he wanted to ask. He started to walk back down Bank Street slowly when the question came to him. It was

about Joe Faber's notebook. He had planned to ask about it but had forgot. Nellie Pindyck, Joe's girl who lived in Philadelphia, had answered his letter, told him she never received the notebook.

He stopped walking. I can scarcely ask him now, he thought. I'll ask next time. He wondered why he hadn't told Zav he was a party member himself. He felt lousy about accepting the "loan," turned and started back toward Loew's Sheridan Theater again, knowing that he would take the subway and turn up at Ellen's house in time to ask her out to dinner...

All the way to Brooklyn Ben thought of Ellen and a good, warm feeling grew in his body before the subway train had even started under the waters of the East River.

Now, though he had no date with her, he knew he would find her home, bathing the baby, preparing her supper. There had been immediate rapport between them. They had understood each other instantly without too many words being spoken, though God knows he had spilled enough words on her dark head that first night at Joe's restaurant and on later dates.

And she in turn had told him of her broken marriage. All in three years she had run the gamut, and it was the 1936 seamen's strike that had sparked her mind and heart. So that when she was first married to Jack Gross, who was a certified public accountant, she was already absorbed in trying to understand the struggle between classes; and by the time the war in Spain was at its height she had arrived independently at what approximated a Communist position, without actually joining the party.

Her husband had fought her every inch of the way and she had fought herself, but the collapse of Aragón coincided with the collapse of her marriage and Jack Gross had moved out saying there was a great deal more to life than politics and he'd be damned if he would put up with her obsessive ideas any longer. They endangered his livelihood, he said, and his first obligation was to his wife and infant daughter, even if she couldn't see it that way.

"It was a painful business," Ellen had told Ben. "You see, I was in love with Jack. I'd been in love with him all through college, and he's a thoroughly decent guy."

"Didn't you get down on the floor and fight it out with him?" Ben said and she had laughed.

"My God," she said, "it went on for a year, hot and heavy. But I don't have a sharp mind and Jack has. I couldn't give him answers that would satisfy him. I told him I couldn't see any separation between what was going on in the world and our baby's life and future, and that if *he* couldn't see that the bombs that killed so

many children in Spain were hanging over our very heads, he was thick."

"What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he agreed. He's no dope. But he said there was more than one way to fight fascism without isolating yourself from the American people and becoming an exile in your own country."

Ellen answered the door wearing a rubber apron and when they came into the kitchen, she introduced Ben to her mother, who looked at him suspiciously.

"I just barged in," he said, "hoping you'd have dinner with me."

"Oh, I'd love to," she said, "but..." and she gestured at the baby in her highchair and her mother who stood there as though someone had entered the room who she had known for years was the personification of everything evil.

"Mama, would you mind?" Ellen said and Mrs. Fuchs sniffed and said, "Don't mind *me*. You know I love to stay with baby."

"Some other time," said Ben but Ellen had said, "Thanks, Mom," and dashed out of the kitchen untying her apron as she left. Mrs. Fuchs looked at Ben and picked up the feeding where Ellen had left off.

"A beautiful baby," Ben said, feeling like a fool.

"What's your line, Mr. Blau?" said Mrs. Fuchs.

"I'm a writer."

"Humph," she said and pointedly turned her back on him. Ben laughed and said, "It's a respectable occupation, Mrs. Fuchs."

Without turning Ellen's mother said, "A man so intelligent as Ellen says should be able to find something better."

"I'm studying law at night," Ben said with a straight face and wondered what had prompted him to tell so outrageous a lie.

Ellen returned just then and kissed her mother, said, "I won't be late, Mama," and kissed the baby. Then, as an after-thought, she added, "Maybe we'll go to a movie."

Ben glanced at her and made his goodbyes and they left. On the ways downstairs he was silent and when they reached the street he turned to Ellen and said, "I just told your mother a whopper. Said I was studying law at night."

"You did?" Ellen laughed. "Whatever *for?*"

"Search *me,*" he said. "I guess the expression on her face when I said I was a writer made me ashamed. Like there was a bad smell in the room. I didn't tell her I was out of a job, though."

"Don't let it worry you," she said. "Mama has never approved of any boy I ever went with, bar none."

Ben was unusually quiet during dinner. There was something he wanted to ask, but he didn't know how to say it. The moment he

had entered Ellen's apartment he had become excited, nervously and physically, and sitting with her now he was distinctly ill at ease and could feel his knees trembling.

She smiled at him and said, "Why the silence?"

"I'm the gloomy type," he said. "Avoid me like the plague."

What he wanted to say was: *Ellen I think I'm in love with you but I'm afraid to ask you what you think of me, or what you might say if I told you, but mostly I'm afraid of being laughed at, even if I know you wouldn't laugh.*

"You could be a very happy man," she said.

"I could?"

"I can see it sticking out all over you."

"You can?"

When they got to Ben's room, Ellen said, "You must be a monk, Ben. Where's all the furniture?"

There was nothing in the furnished room on Pineapple Street except a day bed, a bureau, an armchair and a small table, on which there was a portable phonograph; a floor lamp and a few books on a low shelf.

On the wall was a huge Spanish war poster showing a helmeted aviator, his goggles thrown back on his forehead, watching a flight of planes rising in a V. The slogan said: 1938: *Año de la Victoria!* The pilot had a dazzling smile on his face.

She sat in the armchair and he opened the bottle of wine he had bought on the corner and poured it into two wine glasses. "One moment, *Señorita,*" he said. "I forgot the soft music."

He started the portable phonograph and laid the needle carefully on the record. The second movement of Beethoven's Seventh began to flood the tiny room.

"It's my life ambition to own a Capehart," he said.

"If that's all you want."

"No. I want *everybody* to have a Capehart except Mr. Capehart himself."

They sat listening to the throbbing strings and sipping the wine, and Ellen could not take her eyes from the poster. 1938: *Year of Victory!* When she turned to look at him she said, "It wasn't, was it?"

"No," he said, looking into his wine glass. "It wasn't."

She put down her glass and came to the day bed and knelt on the floor before him and said, "Kiss me, Ben. I'm lonesome."

He kissed her upturned face. "I'm lonesome, too," he said.

"What do you think's happening there tonight?"

"You know," he said, holding her face in both hands and looking at her. "Don't you know?"

"I guess so. Are you sorry you're not there?"

"Yes. And no."

"Why no?"

"If I were in Spain, I wouldn't be here with you."

He laughed with embarrassment. "Funny thing," he said. "It just struck me."

"What?"

"I joined the Brigade at exactly the same time you and your husband separated."

"It's a coincidence," she said.

"Ellen..." he said, then checked himself.

"Say it."

"No."

"It won't hurt you."

"It may hurt *you.*"

"Why?"

"Is it all over with your husband?"

"I think so, Ben."

"Don't you know?"

"I think so," she said and got to her feet, holding his hands till he rose from the bed and they stood embraced.

Very gently, he began to undress her and she began to undress him till they stood naked in each other's arms.

6

February 8, 1948

Ever since he had worked for Columbia Pictures in 1946, Lang had dictated instead of pounding the typewriter himself. With Peggy's encouragement and the speed with which she could transcribe onto the stenotype machine, he discovered that there was considerable satisfaction in dictating and that he could get down a lot of things that eluded him when he used the hunt and peck system.

"I had intended to comment tonight," he said, walking up and down the study, "on Mr. Henry Wallace's odd determination—no, strike the word odd—to run for the Presidency, but this morning I read an article in the *Herald Tribune* which I'm sure many of you have seen, but which everyone—underlined—within reach of this program must—underline that—obtain and read immediately.

"That is Vincent Sheean's front-page story entitled 'Gandhi's Last

Days,' and dealing, of course, with the tragic assassination of the Mahatma on January 30 a week ago, of which Mr. Sheean was an eye witness."

He continued to pace for a while, trying to formulate the idea in his mind. Peggy sat with her hands poised over the machine, watching him and wondering when it would be safe to interrupt. She decided to do it immediately.

"Zav," she said, "I've got to talk to you."

"Not now," he said, continuing to walk, his eyes on the carpet. "Take this. I've had the pleasure of knowing Jimmy Sheean for many years and he seems to me to be one of the major voices of our time—in fact, I might also say, its conscience. No," he said. "Not its conscience. How to say it? *One* of its consciences doesn't sound right."

He dropped into an armchair and looked at Peggy. "What's troubling you?" he said.

"*My* conscience," she said.

He laughed. "Tell me," he said, "Did you really go to church that morning?"

He was referring to the morning he appeared the second time before the committee, when he had spent the night with her, having quarreled with Anne again.

"Certainly," she said and he laughed again. The situation would fit a novel, he thought, or maybe I can work it into a play if I ever write another play.

—Man spends the night in adultery with his mistress, a girl who left the Church years before.

—Man wakes at the crack of dawn to see her getting dressed. Sits up in bed, says, "Where the hell are *you* going?"

—"To church," she says.

—"Good Christ, what *for?*" he says, "I thought you'd given up the Church."

—"I have," she says, "but today I *have* to go."

—"Why?" he says.

—"It's the Feast of the Immaculate Conception," she replies.

"And did you go to confession?" he asked now.

"Of course."

"What did you confess?" he grinned. "The straight and level or the acrobatics?"

"That's between the priest and me, and it's not what I was referring to."

"What were you referring to? I've got to get this broadcast done, you know."

"I know. First things first. Only this *is* important. It's got to do with your wife."

"You let me handle my wife," Zav said, getting out of the chair and crossing to her, "and you can handle *me*."

"No," said Peggy, a frown of annoyance on her face. "We've either got to break this up, or else I've got to work at home or some place else. An office maybe. She knows about us."

"I doubt it," he said. "And what's more I don't particularly care." He started to walk up and down again. "Take this," he said.

"Like many other people of conscience and good will, the author of *Personal History* has examined many philosophies of life and studied the many concepts men have elaborated in order—"

"Look," said Peggy. "I don't like to interrupt you . . ."

"Then don't *do* it," Lang said angrily.

"This situation's impossible."

"Like many other serious Americans," Lang dictated, underlining the words, "Sheean has flirted with Marxist dialectics. You will find a brilliant account of that flirtation in his book *Personal History,* and how he overcame the temptations that false doctrine placed in the path of his search for truth and decency. In his article today—"

"It's truth and decency I'm talking about," said Peggy. He stopped walking and looked at her.

"What am *I* supposed to do?" he said angrily. "Divorce my wife to accommodate you? Is that what you want?"

"I didn't say that."

"You don't have to say it."

"You don't love her anyhow, for that matter."

"Is that any of *your* business, Peg?"

"Thanks. I didn't import *you* from Hollywood, did I?"

"Have you got a guilty conscience now? Is that why you went to confession?"

"Could be."

"Not a chance," he said, suddenly seeing the whole picture. He remembered the time before that, when he had got plastered in her apartment on Morton Street and gone blubbering to Everett Morton. He remembered her question about whether he was "one of *those* characters," her concern about his being called by the committee again, the FBI visit. She was feeling insecure, that was all. (Just as he was himself.)

"It would inconvenience me to have you work at home all the time or to have to work there with you. It would give Anne even *more* reason to be suspicious than you think she has."

"*Think* she has," said Peggy. "I have news for you, Mister L. She *knows*."

"You let me take care of her and you can take care of *me*," he said.

"This is where I came in."

Lang was thoroughly annoyed now. "Take the rest of the day off," he said. "I'll finish the broadcast myself. I can't tolerate this kind of disruption."

"Oh, grow up!" she said. "The day of the harem is over, Zav. But if you've got to have two women, at least keep them apart. Don't ask me to spend all my time here under the watchful eye of your lawful wedded wife. It makes me feel like a fool."

"OK," he said.

"Let me know," she said, letting herself out of the study as he continued to walk up and down, wondering how the hell he was going to recapture his train of thought. God damn all women!

The lean face of Father Francis X. Lynch (his "namesake") suddenly appeared before him. He wondered why. He had met him during the first days of his own enlistment in the Army and before he had had an assignment.

Lynch was an Air Force chaplain who had made a big name for himself. He was awarded the Congressional Medal for extraordinary heroism under fire when the *Luftwaffe* plastered one of the American air-bases in France.

A streamlined Jesuit priest, Lynch was accustomed to taking two Martinis before dinner and could tell an off-color joke as well as the next GI and laugh as heartily if someone else told one. The men loved him and called him a good Joe.

He was distinctly a Twentieth Century product, Lang thought now and wondered what had become of him. He's probably got a rich parish, Zav thought, if he hasn't been elevated. A man like that could go far in the Church and if there were more like him, proselytizing would be duck soup.

The good *padre* almost got me back in the fold over a poker game one night, Lang remembered, and on the spur of the moment he picked up the telephone book (of course I was drunk that night and slopping over with self-pity) and he was not surprised to find a Lynch, Francis X., Msgr., listed.

This is neither here nor there, he thought and brought his mind back to the radio program. There was a wonderful parallelism, he felt, between Sheean's search for truth and his own. Between Sheean's rejection of Marxism (and his own) and going to India to study with the Mahatma.

Not that he could accept all this crap about *Ahimsa* or had

ever found anything in the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Mahabharata* that could nourish his own hunger or allay his fears. (Be more likely to find it in the *Kama Sutra* or the *Anangaranga,* he chuckled.) But that wasn't the point.

What was the point was that a Twentieth Century man like Sheean could write: *To come to India to sit at the feet of a prophet, saint and god is obviously a ridiculous thing to do, from the Anglo-Saxon point of view. Therefore I have resisted it for a good many years. I came to it at last because I was at the end of my tether. I had nowhere else to go.*

It took courage to expose oneself like that to the cynical, materialistic public. To write such phrases as, *Through the tears that blur my eyes,* or *in my present traumatic condition,* and the rest. Whether truth and peace and love were to be found in Ghandiism or not, Lang felt, Sheean was on the way to it and he, Lang, must find a way or destroy himself in the process as well as all the people around him. Certainly the truth could not be found at the bottom of a bottle, sedulously as he had applied himself for nine years to finding it there. (Nor peace. Nor love.)

He sat down at the electric typewriter and started to write, but it was difficult to concentrate. He wanted to draw the parallel between Sheean's search for inner peace and self-understanding and his own; between the famous foreign correspondent's rejection of Communism and his own rejection (without exposing himself too much); to draw some lessons from the struggle that was intensifying between Marxism on the world scene (the cold war) and a capitalism in whose benevolence he could not believe at all.

He noticed a magazine called *Mainstream* lying prominently on the low coffee table with a slip of paper sticking out of it. He picked it up, opened it to the place marked. There was a long poem by Dalton Trumbo called *Confessional.* He couldn't remember whether he had read it—glanced at the magazine; it was a year old—so he started skimming it. Trumbo was one of those Hollywood writers who had been indicted, and only a month ago—

First, I must beg of you, please understand
I've seen the world. I've been the underdog.

(No, he hadn't read it.)

Born in a slum—that's more than you can say

(Ben Blau, his mind added)—

Stood hunger, felt oppression, slept with tears,
Swum in the city's sewage, known the fears
That tenement children suck in with their milk.

(This was good, thought Lang, and sat back to enjoy the poem.

Then he rose immediately, made a brandy and soda and took it back to the arm-chair and read on.)

I've joined with you before in many ways
(And when I haven't joined I've still approved)
Sacco, Vanzetti, the Scottsboro boys—
I had no facts, I simply took your word.

(What the hell was the man driving at, anyhow? Lang wondered. He re-read the poem from the beginning. The speaker had *resigned. Not in a public way, you understand. Not in a way to harm a soul who stays.* Resigned from what?)

For some moments Lang read the poem with pleasure until it began to dawn on him what the poet was up to. This was a consummate piece of irony. He read the words:

I know the other side. I've smelt their works
Deep in my blood, deep in my deepest heart!
I know who burnt the books, proscribed the Jews,
Held festival with gore and putrid flesh,
Slaughtered like beeves the unresisting men,
Made whores their wives till life bled through the wound . . .

Someone, Lang knew, had left this year-old magazine out for him to read this poem. Who could *that* be? Only Peggy or Anne, that much was sure. Year-old magazines were filed in Lang's study in the appropriate places on the magazine racks, in proper order.

You see?
Tears in my eyes!

(The speaker offers his friend a drink. The speaker is rich. The friend had come to him for an explanation of his resignation [Ben Blau]. The speaker is justifying his resignation.)

Well, here's the truth:
In these unhappy times, the press a-bay,
(And furthermore I'm told they have a way
Of planting servants and of tapping wires)
One speaks with care, avoiding certain words—
Even so innocent a man as I!

(It couldn't be the maid who left this out. Absurd! It was someone who was interested in hurting *him,* Francis Lang—that's who it was. Amazing that the man could have written this a year or more ago before he and the others were hauled up before the committee, cited, indicted, arraigned last month, a month ago, Not Guilty!)

And I know who chose first to stand and fight
Rather than flee the uncontested field
In Germany and Rome and in Madrid.

(Dolores! where are you?)

And while they fell no voice in all the world

Had courage to cry out against their fate
Nor will have here. You are the men who die
Silently in the night, and all alone,
Yielding with blood the highway over which
The mottled beast (fascism I guess) *at last moves on his prey—*
His final prey—always and always me . . .
I bow.
I give salute.
I recognize.

(Lang was growing furious as he read. This was a fantastic distortion of the liberal point of view. Even Dolores Muñoz, he remembered, had had a way of wanting him to see things exactly the way she and her party saw them, although she had had the good grace to deny it. Even Blau, in 1939, when I resigned [*not in a public way, you understand*] deliberately refused to understand my point of view. And in 1946, that night after Wilhelmina Patton left in high dudgeon because Ben had tied her up in knots . . . Who the hell left this thing out for me to read? and *why*?)

But I am not in any near degree
One such as you, nor shall I ever be.
Yet I too dream and hold aspiring high—
All this . . .
and more . . .
but, differing from you,
I wish to be both rich and holy too.

Lang felt inclined to throw the magazine out the window but forced himself to read the poem to the end. Then he read it over again from the beginning, tore it out of the magazine, filed it in his file. The words echoed in his mind as he locked the cabinet.

I'm merely human—see this photograph?
These are my children, fat and full of life,
And there, all warm and tender, stands my wife,

(not so warm, not so tender, no children at all, fat *or* thin)

And this my house and these my precious things
All ordered and assembled for the night.
And no one shall disturb them, mark that well!
And no one . . .

He walked up and down the room, biting his lips. The man was diabolically clever, but like many clever men he used a half truth instead of examining the issues frankly, boldly and honestly. No Sheean, this Trumbo. No man like Trumbo (what a name!) could write: *Through the tears that blur my eyes.* That took guts. It was easy enough to be clever.

He heard Anne playing a Chopin *étude* and his mounting fury suddenly found a focus.

Professing your beliefs, if I were you
I'd boldly state myself, accept the blame
And stoutly meet my fate.

Did Blau do that? He did not! He weaseled. He equivocated. He wouldn't say yes and he wouldn't say no, just like Trumbo and the rest of them. I must get this into the broadcast tonight, Lang thought. I must say:

"This magnificent confession of Vincent Sheean's ties right in, in my opinion, with the situation revolving around the Hollywood writers and directors who were arraigned last month in Washington and pleaded not guilty to contempt of Congress.

"Now I would hesitate to pass judgment on any citizen accused of crime. That is the function of our tribunals, which give every accused, no matter how highly placed or how low and humble, the right to due process of law. But it seems to me that these distinguished men have done a distinct disservice to their fellow artists by—"

Professing your beliefs, if I were you
I'd boldly state myself . . .

(What was that other phrase?)

And no one shall conceal behind my name
The perilous plan, the smouldering flame
Which draws to me the fire destined for him!

He opened the rolling doors of his study and Anne stopped playing immediately, though she did not turn to look at him. Uh-huh, he thought. It was she who left the magazine there. *I wish to be both rich and holy too.*

He walked into the living room and stood there looking at the back of her neck. He had not noticed before that it was thicker than it used to be. Good living. He decided to stand there until she turned around, if it took all afternoon. She knew he had entered the room.

She didn't turn but she said, "Through already?"

"I haven't started."

"Peggy left."

"I sent her home."

She turned now and got up. "Are you having an affair with her, Frank?"

"No."

She stood looking at him, an expression of obvious disappointment on her face.

"Don't you believe me?"

"You've had affairs before."

"Of course. And I've told you about them."

"Several I had to find out myself. One, when you were in delirium." He was silent and she said, "Don't you think you've tortured me enough?"

"How histrionic!" he said. "How have I tortured you?"

"With these endless affairs. With your denial now. With other things you've done."

"Did you leave a magazine out for me to read?"

She looked puzzled. "A magazine?"

"A poem by Dalton Trumbo?"

"I was reading it last night when you were out."

"And you thought it would be good for my soul for me to read it, didn't you?"

"Did you like it?"

"Stop the play-acting! You didn't answer my question."

"You didn't answer mine."

"What question?"

"About Peggy."

"I denied it, didn't I?"

"Yes," she said, "you did," and turned away from him. He strode rapidly to her and took her arm.

"Did you leave that magazine out so I'd read that piece of crap?"

"*Is* it a piece of crap?"

"*Answer* me!" he shouted, unconsciously squeezing her arm till she winced.

"Let me go, Frank," she said quietly. He released her arm because the telephone rang in his study and over his shoulder he said, "I'll tend to *you* later."

He picked up the phone and said, "Lang."

A man announced his name and Lang recognized him as one of the committee's men, the Southern Accent, in fact.

"I'd like to see you, Mr. Lang."

"When?"

"As soon as possible," the Accent said. "It's a matter of some urgency."

"What's it about?"

"I'd rather not discuss it on the phone, sir."

"I'm preparing my broadcast for tonight," Lang said. "Can't it wait?"

"Tomorrow morning?"

"That'll be fine. Would you like to come here?"

"If it's convenient to you, sir."

"Eleven o'clock," said Lang, and didn't wait for the monotonous voice to say, I thank you.

He walked back into the living room but Anne was not there. He looked into her bedroom, found her closet open and her favorite fur jacket gone. Bitch, he thought. *You'd* like to be both rich and holy too, wouldn't you?

7

February 11, 1948

Ben had taken the day off from the *Daily*. Work was slack that week and he wanted to do some thinking. A month had passed since a colleague of Sam Tabatchnik's called from Washington to inform him that the House of Representatives had voted Ben in contempt and turned his testimony before the committee over to the Department of Justice. (It had not made a single paper, but the lawyer had seen it in the *Congressional Record* and later mailed it to Sam.)

They had had a conference and agreed that a contempt citation was in the making. So Sam had told Ben to start preparing for an indictment, and he had taken the matter up with his party branch and also informed the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade what was expected.

Sam said it would be a good idea if Ben started to fetch back into his memory and draw up a biography of himself and his development. That way, he might fish up something that would be useful if the thing ever came to trial, for you never knew what sort of witnesses the government might dredge up.

Ben sat in the room on East Fifteenth Street, studying the transcript of his testimony and making notes for the autobiographical sketch. It was a dull task, but it was more difficult than it was dull. For he found that his mind wandered as he made notes and took him off on tangents that had nothing to do with the matter in hand. (Maybe that high-school psychology teacher was right when he said nobody could think logically for more than twenty seconds at a time!)

Well, at least he had no history of previous convictions.

I must be a pretty dull fellow, Ben decided. I even bore myself. The nearest he had ever come to tangling with the law was in 1935, when he covered the WPA sit-down strikes for higher wages

and was in the office of the Writers' Project when the cops tried to break it up. He had immediately identified himself as a reporter and had been turned loose.

He recalled the meeting of his party branch early in January, when they had discussed both his appearance before the committee and the likelihood that he would find himself in hot water pretty soon. He had given a full report of his testimony and the comrades had read the transcript. Then they began to take him apart.

They took him apart with considerable affection but with indisputable acuteness, and Ben was amused now (and disconcerted) by the vigor with which he had defended himself.

For the comrades agreed that he had allowed himself to be provoked, which was precisely what his attorney had warned him not to do. They agreed that he had let his own feeling of superiority in the face of the committee's moral and political illiteracy lead him into the trap it had prepared for him.

Bill Quigley, whom Ben had never been able to bring himself to like, had been the sharpest. "I think Ben should criticize himself," Quigley said. (He had been making notes during the reading of the transcript.)

"First, he should have realized that this is no time for comedy. He couldn't resist scoring off the committee. This was childish. I might even say it was a prime example of what Lenin called 'an infantile disorder'—left sectarianism."

"I disagree," said Ben. "Nothing's more successful in certain situations than a little ridicule, a little irony. Cervantes is credited with laughing the institution of chivalry out of existence with Don Quixote. Defoe—"

"That's ridiculous," said Quigley, who was the editor of a trade union newspaper. "Feudalism and all its trappings weren't laughed out of existence, even by Cervantes. Every historical—"

"All right," said Dave Bennett, who was the chairman that night. "I think we all know what Ben meant. Let Bill finish his remarks."

"Sorry," said Ben.

"Secondly," Quigley said, "Ben's arrogance gave ammunition to the enemy. While I can appreciate and applaud the desire to fight back, the fact of the matter is that this was no debate. Nor was it a display of drawing-room repartee. Such wise cracks as . . ." he examined his notes . . . " 'I don't like your committee' and 'I'll answer it when you answer mine,' merely feed the distorted public opinion which already exists about our movement. They present us in the light of cocksure, wise-cracking cynics—"

This time Joyce, who worked in the *Daily* morgue, interrupted.

"I'm burned up!" she said. "I think Bill's being smug, pedantic and self-satisfied. I think he's humorless—"

"No personalities, Joyce," Dave Bennett smiled. (He had an idea that Joyce had a crush on Ben.)

"All right," said Joyce. "It's just that Ben's a fighter. He was in Spain and World War II and he knows how to handle himself. So maybe he made a couple of mistakes. Who could blame him? What I'm concerned about is this—he *fought*. He didn't back down. He gave them as good as he got. I don't blame him if he got angry. I listened to the whole thing myself and I got so mad I nearly burst a blood vessel. That's *all!*" she said, as though she had delivered a definitive argument.

Bennett said, "Bill, are you through?"

"Well, yes," said Quigley, "except that I really think that whenever any one of us is put in a public pillory like this, we owe it to the movement to show the face of our party at its best."

"If I may step out of the chair for a moment," Dave said. "I covered the hearings. I think it's very easy to criticize Ben for the mistakes he made, for permitting himself to be provoked. These inquisitions are something new in our country. You're on the pan. You have no defense. You have no foreknowledge of what sort of unfair, leading questions are going to be fired at you. This is thinking on your feet, at its worst. But I think Bill has a point that Ben will have to consider. And that's the sort of impression we make on people who don't share our point of view. I'd like to hear what Ben has to say himself."

"Well, damn it all," said Ben, "I accept the criticism, of course. Sam warned me that the purpose of the investigation was to put me on the spot, and I certainly obliged the committee by placing myself on it myself.

"But that doesn't mean that if it were to happen again, I might not make the same mistakes. Sam advised me of my constitutional rights and told me to try, if I could, to explain why I was invoking the First Amendment. I obviously failed in that.

"But to be perfectly frank, I must tell you that at the risk of being called an infantile leftist and a romantic and a subjective fool (and I've been called all three), I'm still uncomfortable with the necessity to invoke the constitution in such situations. I'm probably too sensitive—as a newspaperman—to the weight of public opinion.

"I still think—when it comes to the impression we make on people who don't share our viewpoint but might not be hostile—that we might create a better impression if we stated our case flatly,

honestly, vigorously and let it go at that. Then nobody could accuse us—even dishonestly—of being devious or—"

"Now wait a minute," said Quigley and Ben said, "I'm sorry I interrupted you. Please don't interrupt *me.*"

"I thought you were finished."

"No," said Ben. "I'm really thinking out loud. I know all the arguments. Sam Tabatchnik advanced them all for me and I've done some reading in constitutional law and history since then to make certain I understood what he was talking about. And he was right.

"I agree that we must know how to fight under all circumstances. The fight in Germany and Spain was one type of battle against fascism. The fight against the committee's a different type of fight and requires different weapons, as well as different strategy and tactics."

"Then we're agreed," Dave Bennett said with a smile.

"We're agreed all right," said Ben, "except that I reserve the right—after nine years in the party—to be wrong once in a while and flip my lid when the dirty bastards go to work on me. As it is, invoking the First Amendment didn't solve any problems, did it? I'm probably going to be cited for contempt anyhow."

"If you hadn't invoked it," the Negro editor said, "you'd have been cited for perjury. After nine years in the movement, Ben," Dave added with a smile, "you should have got rid of the notion that the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is either cherished or respected by the enemy. It isn't. They only use it as a trap for you. And I disagree when you say you didn't get your point across. You can't influence the enemy by *anything* you say. But any decent-minded person hearing your testimony would realize that you were a principled man trying to state your case in the face of totally unprincipled attacks."

"Well, thanks," said Ben.

"But that doesn't absolve you of irresponsibility," Bennett said with a brilliant smile. "So be sure you don't reserve the right to be wrong too often. You might end up by making a principle of it."

Sitting now in the furnished room, he thought, I did much better in the self-critical department when I spoke to the vets. They had a bone to pick with me too, as a member of VALB, but maybe I did better with them because they, too, had in mind the physical struggle against the enemy and would have been tempted themselves to lash back with the only weapons you have in such an unequal combat—your mind and tongue.

He was staring at the daybed and his mind told him, you don't want to think about these things now. You want to think about... *No,* you want to call Sue Menken. It's two months since you've seen

her and you want her back. Why? Physical desire, or something more important? How the hell was a man to know? The business with Sue was not in any way similar to the business with Ellen Gross.

You thought you were in love with Ellen, and you didn't think you were in love with Sue. In fact, you "knew" you weren't. Now you think you're in love with Sue (because she left you flat?) and were never in love with Ellen!

Why not call her? he thought. What can you lose? Tomorrow's Lincoln's Birthday, holiday. Maybe she'll see you. No, he said to himself, you won't call her till you know your own mind. You won't play with other people's emotions. You don't make *use* of women.

He suddenly recalled Francis Lang's offer in Le Havre, way back in 1938, to drive the guys up to Paris and take them to a *poule de luxe* who had a calling card that said what? Oh yes, *Mlle. Rose, Spécialités.* That was a good one. Anyhow why not call up Lang himself and ask him point-blank: Are you now talking or have you ever talked to the committee about me? Obviously he had. What did he say?

Ben had listened to Lang's broadcasts ever since he had been subpoenaed himself, and he felt he detected a new note in them. That one last Sunday, as a matter of fact, with all that horse turd about Vincent Sheean sitting at the feet of Ghandi because he was at the end of his rope, and the clear implication that Lang himself was looking for something to hang onto.

But somehow Ben couldn't quite believe that Lang would go the way of the rest. Was that wishful thinking? Or sentimentalism, as Sue insisted? You don't owe the man anything even if he loaned you a hundred bucks you paid back, and got a contract for you. Are you sorry you—and the vets—took his lousy defeatist play apart? *Better to Die.* Yeah, maybe it is at that, for some people.

They went for Zav's play all right. They ate it up. Why? Because it didn't demand anything of them. Because it exploited the sad, nostalgic aura of the lost cause. Because the audience had a guilty conscience about Spain. Because there was a luscious dish in it that the hero was mad for (Dolores Muñoz, of course) who died on the very night he was going to take her to bed. Died in an air raid on Madrid. *Hearts and Flowers.* ("I never slept with her... Swear to God I never...") You'd think the whole war was a lost cause because boy didn't get girl.

Just like Hemingway's book, Ben thought, where the shattering struggle of twenty-eight million people for survival and decency was subordinated to an endless episode in a sleeping bag, and the phrase

"the earth moved" was quoted by bohemians and bourgeois with a leer on their faces. "Did the earth move?" they said to each other as a gag. Or, "How come the earth didn't move, only the bedsprings?"

There was a knock on the door and Ben looked up and said, "Come in." Mrs. Hornstein opened the door and a man who was standing behind her came into the room. Ben saw the landlady's face and looked up at the man.

"Ben Blau?" he said. He wore a hat with a snap brim and there was a smile on his face.

"Yes."

The man took a paper out of his pocket and said, "I have a warrant for your arrest."

"What for?"

"You might read it."

Ben unfolded the paper and glanced at it.

"What did you do?" Mrs. Hornstein said.

"This doesn't say anything, brother, except for you to arrest me and something about some law numbered US Code something or other."

"Something about a government committee," the marshal said, taking a pair of hundcuffs out of his back pocket. Mrs. Hornstein saw them and let out a short scream.

"Are those necessary?" said Ben.

"Strictly S. O. P.," said the marshal, who had been in the Navy during the war.

Ben turned to Mrs. Hornstein and said, "Mrs. H, remember when I was in all the papers?" She was wringing her hands and nodding her head mechanically, and Ben suddenly had the feeling that she resembled his mother in a way he had never noticed before. "I told you, remember, about contempt of Congress?"

"Weh ist mir," said Mrs. Hornstein.

"Not contempt," the marshal said. "Perjury."

"Can I use the phone?" said Ben, then, "Perjury! That's a *lie!*"

"Sure," the marshal said. "Use the phone."

8

February 12, 1948

Lang paced his study all that Thursday morning. He had to make up his mind, and he was finding it difficult to make up his mind. He should have started thinking about the broadcast coming up Sunday and what he would say about the situation in Czechoslovakia, where the Communists had gained such strength that a change in the government seemed imminent. Lincoln's birthday, he thought. Humph! Lincoln was born and I am dying every minute. I'll be forty-eight years old in November, for Christ's sake!

Actually, there was very little choice presented to him. The Southern Accent and the Assistant United States Attorney Phelps Billings had more or less made up his mind for him before they had even come to see him three days before. He wondered idly how many assistant US attorneys there were. There must be thousands!

And the Southern Accent had said nothing on the phone about bringing anyone along; a man whose brief case held—in typed detail—whatever answer Lang's mind would eventually give to the "question" they had asked him.

Anne had seen them when they came in Monday and had asked later who they were. He had not told her but he had a suspicion that she had recognized the lean face of the Southern Accent. It had seen the public prints often enough. He had told her something or other noncommittal. *That* situation, he thought as he paced the study, was about to change, as Dolores Muñoz or any of the comrades might have put it, from quantity to quality.

So many years of friction, tension, squabbles, misunderstandings and fundamental misalliance must finally change into their opposite.

Nuts to it. There were things that were more important. How cleverly they operate! he thought. How barren was the choice they presented to him as though he had a choice! The testimony of Ben Blau, they told him, had been presented to the grand jury. The grand jury had issued an indictment and Ben had been arrested and was in prison.

There would be a trial. If Blau were convicted, he faced five years in prison and fines up to ten thousand dollars. At the trial of Blau the government would offer the following evidence: 1. That he had been subpoenaed by the committee; 2. That he had appeared and been sworn; 3. That he had testified; 4. That he had stated, under oath, that when he was in Spain he had not (a) been trained by Red Army men; (b) served under Red Army men.

This, said Asistant US Attorney Phelps Billings, constituted perjury. And the moment he said it Lang had said, "You have no case. I'd advise you to drop it."

"Why?" said the young man in the double-breasted blue serge suit. "What do you mean?"

"Your case hangs upon the definition of the phrase 'Red Army men'!"

Mr. Phelps Billings sighed. "The definition's well established, Mr. Lang. A Red Army man is a soldier in the international army of Communism."

"Wrong," said Lang. "He's a soldier in the Red Army of the Soviet Union."

The Southern Accent sounded his unaccented laugh. "We all know," he said, "that Commonism is an international movement and we all know that the Red Army of Poland is the same army as the Red Army of Russia."

"It's a semantic point," said Lang. "I don't think it would stand up in court. Of course, I'm no lawyer."

"A what?" said the Accent and Lang explained.

"No," said Billings, "I don't think there would be any difficulty in making the definition stand up. All that's needed is an expert witness whose reputation and integrity cannot be impeached."

Lang saw both men looking at him and he said automatically, "You're not looking at *me!*" They were silent and he said vehemently, "I most certainly won't testify to any such absurdity, nor will I be a witness against Blau."

Semantics or no semantics, Red Army of the USSR or People's Army of the Polish People's Republic, to the minds of the Accent, the US attorney, the judge and the sort of jury that would be selected in these cold war days, Red was Red, Army was Army and the truth would be a lie.

Even before Billings had explained to him, quite calmly, that he would prefer him to be a voluntary witness but (to make it look better) he would subpoena him, he knew that whether he appeared voluntarily or under subpoena there was only one thing he could say.

Now he stopped pacing long enough to pour a straight brandy into a whiskey glass and drain it off like Clem Elliman downed Jameson or Bushmill's. He didn't bother to use the snifter, to warm it in his large hands, to inhale the fumes, to roll it around in the graceful bubble of the glass and see how it adhered to the sides.

Why, he asked himself now, are you confined to one answer? Why can't you stand up in the courtroom and say: *Your Honor, ladies and gentlemen of the jury. I have been subpoenaed by the*

government to testify to a lie. This is an outrageous frameup! I will not testify to a lie. And I denounce this obscene attempt to railroad an innocent man, an authentic American hero, to prison for five years!

That would be the only honest thing to say. Why not say it? *You* would be a hero. Sure, he thought, and throw away the radio program (who gives a damn?), kiss off the possibility of producing plays, publishing books, corresponding for the news services, speaking from the lecture platform. (This is important? as Bert Flax might say. I spit on it.) Sure, and throw away over twenty-five years of succesful effort to escape the grinding poverty of your childhood and your miserable adolescence, and return to it!

What makes you think any such thing would happen? What makes you think you wouldn't be acclaimed by press and public the archetype of the American man? Who would give you a job? A byline? A platform these days? *The Daily Worker? Mainstream?* At how much a week, a month, a year? Who would keep you, you prostitute of the pen (a Soviet epithet, at that!) in the style to which you have become accustomed? The party you abandoned nine years ago after you got that telephone call from—? *Mais quel geste!* he thought, and poured another brandy which cost plenty a bottle. (*I want to be both rich and holy too.*)

Mr. Billings had made Lang's position clear without even using any words that applied directly to the dilemma. Lang had been in Spain. He had met, as he had testified under oath, the leading Communists of Spain and many other countries. He had met the Polish Communist Karol Swierczewski, known in Spain as General Walter. He knew about the Third International. He knew that these International Brigade men had not gone to Spain of their own free will to fight fascism.

At this point Lang bridled and said, "I know nothing of the sort! I met all kinds of men in Spain, in the Lincoln, the Thaelmann, the Dombrowski battalions, in the *Garibaldini,* the Mac-Paps, the Franco-Belge, the Rakoczy. They weren't all Communists by a hell of a sight!"

"Most of them were," said Billings.

"I met a hard-shelled Republican from Vermont," Lang said feebly. "I met a devout Catholic—many of them in fact—and the fact of the matter is that the vast majority of the Spanish people themselves are Catholics, and the vast majority of the Spanish people fought Franco and hate his guts to this very day!"

"We're not talking about the Spanish people," the Accent said. "We're talking about an American Commonist who went to Spain under orders because the American Commonist Party told him to."

"Blau wasn't a Communist when he went to Spain," Lang said. "He was when he came back," the Accent said.

"What difference does it make?" said Billings. "He's been taking orders from Moscow since 1939."

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Billings," Lang said coldly, "that it's quite possible for large numbers of people to agree on a common objective and work toward it in a disciplined manner without any orders from on top? How else do you account for the American Revolution—not to mention the Russian? The endless Irish Republican rebellions? A football game? Discipline and self-discipline are two different things. I yield to no one in my support of the Spanish Republic—and there's another example of collective determination —and I'm no Communist."

"You were," Billings said quietly.

Lang caught the point immediately. Sure, sure, I lied to them the first time and they're going to rub my nose in it from now on in.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I think you've come to the wrong man. I'm sure you can find any number of 'expert' witnesses who will testify to what you want said. I'm not one of them. I will not testify to a lie."

"No one would expect you to," Billings said.

"The government wouldn't permit you to, Mr. Lang," said the Accent.

"You're using a gimmick, believe me, what they call a 'wienie' in Hollywood," said Lang. "If you want to hang Ben Blau, you'd better find a stronger noose than a play on words."

"No one's interested in hanging Mr. Blau," said Billings. "The Department of Justice had no interest whatsoever in this proceeding until the Congress submitted his testimony to us. We turned it over to the grand jury.

"The grand jury examined the testimony and found sufficient evidence that Blau had perjured himself to warrant an indictment. An indictment, of course," he lectured, "is not a conviction. It might very well be that a jury would agree with *you,* Mr. Lang, that a case had not been made. The Department's obliged, however, to prosecute when a grand jury indicts."

"Sure," said Lang, with a brash vehemence that surprised himself, "but I covered the Federal courts in Seattle long enough to know that the Department didn't *have* to submit the testimony to a grand jury; and when the Department wants an indictment, the jury generally hands one down. It didn't *use* to be that way, but more and more these days it is!"

"The Department is just as interested as you, Mr. Lang," said Phelps Billings, "in preventing a miscarriage of justice. It's our

sworn duty to protect the innocent as well as to prosecute the guilty."

"I should hope so," Zav said.

"I might also say that you're under no compulsion whatsoever to cooperate. I had thought from your own testimony that you were in the mood to assist your government. You were very forthright in your last appearance before the committee."

"Thank you," said Lang, "but I'm sure my government wouldn't want me to violate my conscience."

"That goes without saying," said the Southern Accent. "I suggested that Mr. Billings here might want to see you to ascertain your attitude. You mustn't think you're under any pressure in this matter."

"Thank you."

"There are, of course, many people," said Billings, "who could testify to the actual affiliation of General Walter and the relationship that exists between the Polish Army and the Army of the Russian government."

"That's what I said."

"But there are very few," said Billings, "who enjoy your reputation for integrity, or whose testimony would carry as much weight as that of Francis Lang."

"You flatter me."

"Thank you for giving us your time, Mr. Lang," Billings said, rising.

"It was kind of you," said the Accent.

"Not at all," said Lang, seeing them out.

There's plenty of time, he thought, teetering slightly as he poured another brandy. It would take time to get the case on the calendar. Blau would find a smart lawyer who would ask for continuances. They all did. They would find a better witness after all.

After reviewing the discussion in his mind he was satisfied that he had stood up to them and made it plain that his testimony could not be bought or sold, that he would have to follow his own conscience.

Lang had covered enough trials in his newspaper days to know that a reluctant witness (for either side) was a doubtful quantity. You never could tell what he was likely to say or when a clever cross-examination by opposing counsel would bring out the pressure which had been applied to drag him into court.

He sat down to the electric typewriter.

I, Francis X. Lang, he wrote, *was visited on February* 9, 1948, *by Mr. Phelps Billings of the U.S. Attorney's office in New York City, and by an investigator for the Committee on Un-American Activities, Mr.* — he paused and asked himself, why are you writing

this down? To put in the safe-deposit box against some future date when it may come in handy? And for what purpose? And who the hell do you think *you* are, Georgi Dimitrov at the *Reichstag* fire trial? You're not even Ben Blau.

He ripped the sheet of paper out of the typewriter, switched off the machine and walked to the window and looked out into University Place. Flags were flying from many poles on the buildings across the street. Mr. Lincoln, he thought, what good does it do you now to have the flags flying in honor of your birthday? They murdered you, didn't they? They shot you down in cold blood. . . .

The really shocking thing about prison, Ben thought as he sat in his cell, is the total rupture between the life that people live outside and the life you live inside. Inside you can hardly imagine what it's like outside. Outside you can't imagine what it's like inside.

Even though you were surrounded by other men—hundreds of them—you were neither with them nor were you alone. You saw them at chow, even walked with them in single file off the range, down the clanging iron staircase into the central well of the cell block. You talked from cell to cell with them without seeing them. You were looked at and watched by other men who wore uniforms, but you were not *with* any of them.

Immediately you were surrounded and overwhelmed and absorbed into the insane atmosphere that existed in such places. And immediately, the resiliency of human beings made itself manifest: in their attempts to behave like human beings; in the grim jokes they invented; in the blithe pretext they made that, what the hell, there's nothing to this; you can do it standing on your head.

The guy in the next cell pounded on the iron plates and passed a folded newspaper to you, both of you stretching an arm to reach each other. Scraps of conversation floated back and forth. The tier man, a trusty, took a moment or so out of his chores to pass the time of day with the confined. The radio, out of reach and out of control, played popular music and news broadcasts.

But the unreality of the place swamped the feeble attempts of the inmates to maintain an even keel. The bitter humor of the tier man handing you a long-handled brush in the early morning with which to scrub out your toilet bowl and saying, "Here's your toothbrush," was drowned in the endless hours during which you sat or lay on the hard bunk or tried to read the newspaper or listened, perforce, to the radio programs you could neither select nor shut off.

The same afternoon he had been picked up, hauled off, mugged and fingerprinted, stripped, bathed, his clothes taken away and the contents of his pockets listed, blue denims issued, Ben's lawyer had arrived and he had been passed out through the cell door, the tier gate, the other gate at the bottom of the block and still another pair of doors into the waiting room.

The vets' office had called Sam Tabatchnik and he had appeared. He had all the facts at his disposal and the information that Ben could be released on bail if a thousand dollars could be found.

"Do you know anyone with that kind of money?" Sam said and Ben said, "Francis Lang." Tabatchnik looked at him, not certain whether or not he was serious, but Ben rapidly set Sam and himself straight by saying, "Don't call him. I have a feeling it would be wrong."

He thought of his brother Leo's former partner, the attorney Pevner, and asked Sam if he knew him. Sam shook his head. And Ben decided Pevner would never put it up, even if he had it.

"The vets are out to raise it," Tabatchnik said. "It may take a couple days but I thought I'd ask in case you had any leads you could give them."

Ben wanted to talk about the indictment, a copy of which Sam had, but the lawyer said, "Let's get you out of here first. Are you OK?"

"Sure," said Ben. "Just bored."

There were so many things in his mind he didn't know which to fish out first, and he didn't want to burden the attorney with his confusions or speculations. He wanted Sam to call Sue Menken but didn't ask him to. He wanted to ask how long it would take to get to trial; what were the chances of having the indictment quashed; what defense would they make to the absurd charge on which he was held.

They did have a short discussion about that, but it was unsatisfactory. Ben was inclined to think the allegation was ridiculous and could easily be dismissed. Tabatchnik didn't take so sanguine a view of it.

"In ordinary times," he said, "there'd be no question."

"But it's ridiculous," said Ben. "I didn't lie. I didn't commit perjury. The Red Army—"

"Of course you didn't," said Sam, "but the thing *we* have to do —if we can't avoid a trial—is to convince a *jury* that you told the truth. And I have a hunch that this isn't going to be so much a question of whether a given man before a congressional committee told the truth or not, as it will be a trial of the ideas you profess,

your party affiliation and what the government wants the jury to believe that party stands for."

"Well," said Ben, "get me out of here as fast as you can so we can get to work on it." He laughed.

"We'll do it, Ben," said Tabatchnik. "Be patient. It won't be more than thirty-six hours at the most, I'd say. The vets are on the ball."

"Thank them for me, will you?" said Ben and Sam nodded.

He walked along the tier and just before he got to his own cell he saw the man in the next one, a youngish man with blond hair and wide blue eyes who looked at him with an expressionless face. Ben smiled and said, "Hi."

Then he stood in front of his own cell, aware that the guard at the end of the range was waiting at the switch. Absurd, wasn't it! The liberated lion asking to be let back into his cage, conditioned like one of Pavlov's dogs.

He sat for awhile on the uncomfortable little metal shelf under the metal table that was bolted to the wall and looked through the bars and the screening into the whitewashed block itself. There was nothing to see but the long windows with opaque panes that ran up and down the opposite wall.

He heard another man on the tier above sying, "Lemme outta here lemme outta here lemme outta here god damn it lemme outta here I say," and then grow silent.

He heard a hammering on the wall at his left and said, "Yes?" It was the blond guy in the next cell.

"What you in for, brother?" the voice said. It was as expressionless as the face.

"Perjury, it says here," said Ben.

"What's that?"

Ben moved from the shelf to the lower bunk of the double-decker so he could be closer to the wall and not attract the attention of the screw.

"They say I told a lie before a government committee."

"Committee?"

"Yeah. Committee on Un-American Activities."

There was a long silence from the next cell and then the voice said, "I think I read about you. Name of Blau?"

"That's right. Blau."

Then there was a longer pause and the voice said, "Did you lie?"

"No. What've they got on *you?*"

"Armed robbery. Three counts."

"What's *your* name?"

"Levine."

"Bum rap, *landsman?*"

"Naw. I did it. Done it before. I'm a two-time loser. If they hang it on me I'll go up for life."

"You haven't been tried?"

"No. Say," Levine said. "You a Red?"

"That's what they say."

"Whatta *you* say?"

"I don't."

"Why not?"

"I'd tell anybody anything I think," said Ben, "if he asked me. But not if he forced me under penalty of losing my job or my freedom."

"I don't follow you."

"Do we get any recreation here? I'll explain it."

"Sure," said Levine. "We go out in the yard for an hour when they feel like letting us, or up to the top tier if the weather's lousy."

"See you," Ben said.

He tried to talk to Levine on the chow line that first night, but the screw saw him and pointed one finger at him, shot out his lower lip in a pout.

"*You,*" he said. "No talking."

So he didn't talk to Levine at table, though he sat next to him after they had got their chow on the cafeteria trays from the steam table and walked in single file to the tables. Levine didn't even look at him.

The next day was Lincoln's birthday and all day the radio was loud with patriotic music and occasional speeches by politicians. President Truman spoke and a couple Republican congressmen spotted at various points in the country, who were still riding Lincoln's coat-tails eighty-three years after his death.

The National Anthem was played several times during the day and every time Levine said, "Are you standing up, you Red son-of-a-bitch?"

Then Ben understood why the man in the next cell had not spoken to him the night before on the chow line or that morning when they had gone to the top tier, on which there were no cells—nor any recreational equipment—and spent an hour walking back and forth.

A patriotic crook; and why not? The world was full of them. But a Jewish criminal was, in a way, a personal affront to Ben, a personal burden. And every time the Anthem was played Levine varied the question: Are you standing up, you commie bastard? Are you standing up, you Red bugger?

That night after chow (Levine had moved down the tier the moment the cells were opened so he wouldn't have to walk or sit next to Ben) the radio produced Raymond Massey delivering the Gettysburg Address, and that at least was something to listen to even if it didn't last very long.

He had been thinking about Francis Lang and fighting the sense of loneliness and abandonment that is inescapable in prison, even when you know, as he did, that he had an organization—two organizations. in fact—working to get him out.

"*Now we are engaged in a great civil war,*" the voice was saying, "*testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure.*" (The cold war!)

Ben was tormented by a maddening desire to find out somehow or other whether Zav was in any way responsible for his being there. But how did you find out such a thing? It might not have been his fault at all. They had mentioned an interview Lang had done with him and he vaguely recalled it, but he had never seen it in print. If so, they knew that Lang knew him. It must have been printed somewhere and if they had a *dossier* on Lang they must have come across it.

"*But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here—*" (in Spain, in Germany, in Italy and in the Pacific, Ben thought, at Stalingrad, at Leningrad, Wake Island, Kwajalein, Veliki Luki and in Warsaw and the Bulge. Good God, where *haven't* they struggled, where won't they struggle and when will they rest from struggle?)

"*The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work—*"

Amen, Abe, Ben thought.

"*—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*"

The radio was snapped off at that point and the lights in the cell block dimmed and the individual cell lights went out. It was ten o'clock.

"Hurray for the Red, White and Blue!" some guy shouted far down the range and there was some laughter. Another yelled, "Pipe down!"

Ben was wondering what sort of a voice Lincoln had, whether it was deep and rich and resonant like Massey's. Probably not, he thought. Could be it was high-pitched and—? then quietly, but

with considerable resonance, Levine spoke and Ben knew he was speaking to him.

"Did you hear that? Did you *hear* what the man said? *That's* what you're trying to destroy, you dirty bastard. You're a disgrace to the Jews! If I could get my mitts on you, I'd beat the living shit outta you."

"Hear this!" said the public address system. "Now hear this! All units. Make your ten o'clock count. Make your ten o'clock count."

Ben slid under the coarse blanket and lay with his hands behind his head staring at the springs in the bunk above him. It would be better, he thought, if he had a cell mate, even Levine. Sue, he thought, what're you doing tonight, sweetheart? Where are you, and are you thinking about me? . . .

Lang was still at the window, staring at the flags flying across the street, and he was more than a little drunk, when there was a knock on the sliding doors of his study.

Lunch, he thought, and continued to look out the window. To hell with it! He had no appetite. He hadn't even got to first base in his effort to think his way out of the dilemma that had been presented to him three days earlier.

Maybe I shouldn't think about it at all, his mind said. Maybe if I just ignore it, it will go away. He laughed out loud. There was a louder knock on his door and he remained standing, looking out the window, knowing that if Anne wanted him to come to lunch she'd open the doors herself and come right in. I'm not hungry, he thought. I'll probably never be hungry again as long as I live.

"Frank?" he heard her say, and he didn't answer. He didn't even turn around when the doors slid open.

"There's something I want to know," she said and came to him as he stood at the window, thinking, it's a long way down, isn't it? "Yes," he said dully.

She took him by one arm and turned him around and he faced her. She saw that his eyes were bloodshot, his pupils contracted.

"Yes," he said, "I'm drunk. So what?"

"That's not what I wanted to know." He was silent, so she continued. "Who were those two men who came to see you Monday morning?"

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," he said.

"One of them was from the committee, wasn't he?"

"Who are you?" he said, "the chairman? If you know so much,

why ask?" He walked away from her in the general direction of the brandy decanter.

"What did he want of you?"

He took the cut-glass stopper out of the decanter, poured himself a shot, replaced the stopper and lifted the glass to his lips. He looked at her over the glass.

"He wanted to know if I was the master of my fate, the captain of my soul. I told him."

"Frank, *answer* me!"

"He wanted me to play pat-a-cake with him."

She looked puzzled and he laughed and drained off half the brandy.

"Did you see the morning paper?" she said.

"I refuse to answer," he replied, "on the grounds that the First Amendment protects my right to a free press, free speech, free alcohol and free tail." He drained the rest of the drink and felt it hit him hard. Ah, that was something.

"Did you have anything to do with Blau's being arrested?"

"What would *I* have to do with it?" he said, dropping into the armchair and staring at her as though she were a new specimen under a compound microscope.

"Did you?"

"Madame Chairlady," he said, "Table the motion."

"What lie did he tell the committee?"

"How should I know?"

"You heard his testimony," she said and he replied, "So did you."

"I didn't hear anything that could have been called perjury."

"Are you a lawyer now?"

"Was one of those men a government lawyer?"

Lang didn't answer.

"Did they ask you to testify against Blau?"

"No comment."

"Did they?"

"None of your god damned business, pie-face," he said. She turned at that remark and started from the room and he leaped to his feet, crossed the room and grabbed her arm.

"Where you going?"

"I don't know," she said. He led her back to a chair and pressed down on her arm with a judo hold so that she had to sit down. He took an unsteady step backward.

"I don't want you talking about things that don't concern you," he said.

"What are *you* talking about?"

"Blau," he said. "Me. Perjury. Anything. None o' your business."

"I don't follow you."

"No," he said, "you're not very bright, are you?"

"I guess I'm not," she said. "But I'll try—if you'll help me. You told me the committee questioned you about Blau and you admitted you told them he was a Communist."

"Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other."

"Then, right after you appeared the second time, he was subpoenaed and they asked *him* — you heard them — whether he knew you."

"You bore me," he said elaborately, making for the decanter again.

"Then he's arrested and held for perjury. I want to know—Frank, *look* at me—what you had to do with all this. I want to know what the committee man and that other man asked you to do Monday."

Lang poured another glass and mumbled. "I told you. They want t' know whether it's true that the square on the hypothenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides, or not. I tol' them I'd figger it out."

"Frank," she said, "unless you answer my question, this is the last time you'll ever get a chance."

He held the glass up, looked through it and said, "Look, she threatens me. Gee whiz! *Me* she threatens!"

"You *are* going to be a witness against him!"

He drained the glass, turned and said viciously, "I haven't made up my mind, and whether I do or don't it's none of your god damned business and get to hell out of here!"

"I'm going," she said.

"Where?"

She had started toward the door and now she turned and looked at him incredulously. "Don't you know?"

"You mean my li'l pie-face's leaving me after all these happy years o' wedded bliss?"

"Stop calling me that!"

"I know," he said. "It's condescending, isn't it?" He grinned. "Lang the two-timer, Lang the drunk, now Lang the male supremacist. Anything else?"

"Yes!" she said, her voice trembling with rage. "Lang the liar. Lang the coward. Lang the *Judas!"*

"Blau the Christ!" said Lang, howling with amusement he didn't feel.

"I know he took care of you when you had delirium tremens and sent for me and waited till I came from Paris; and I remember another conversation we had a couple of years ago, and—"

"What conversation?"

"And I heard you rave about him for years, almost as if you were in love with him. And two months ago I heard him protect you before the committee and refuse to say whether he knew you or not—"

"He had his reasons."

"Whatever they were, they were decent and they merely got him in worse trouble, while *your* reasons—"

"Should I hang myself? That's what Judas did."

"You will," she said, "whether you do or not. You're out to kill yourself one way or another."

"Aha!" he said, "now you're Doctor Everett Morton, the head shrinker. Will wonders never cease?"

"I don't know why you married me," she said.

"My only love," said Lang, "I never loved you. The only woman I ever loved has been dead for ten years."

"You never loved her, either," Anne said. "You never loved anyone but yourself."

"How about a few more glittering generalities?" he said. "How about the Best-Years-of-My-Life routine; how about the Worked-My-Fingers-to-the-Bone that my mother used to pull, except that she *did* and you haven't done a lick of work since I married you except lie around on your fat ass and play the piano like a ten-year-old."

"I don't know how I could have been such a fool, but I'll find out. Goodbye."

"Go to *Blau*," he said as she started from the room. "You two really ought to get together. He'd probably like a juicy piece like you—when he gets out."

"Thank you," she said. "That's exactly where I'm going."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm going to the Veterans of the Lincoln Brigade to put up his bail," she said, and she was gone.

Lang suddenly felt a powerful compulsion to scream at the top of his lungs and controlled it with the greatest difficulty. He felt like picking up things and throwing them, throwing the decanter at the mirror, shattering it, picking up a chair and smashing the desk with it, throwing the typewriter through the window into University Place.

He pointed his finger at the mirror and said, *"Bang!"* He pointed it again at his own head and said, *"Pow!"*

"Whang! whang! whang!" he said, trying to approximate the sound of a near ricochet. Then he stopped. He rolled the doors of his study closed and started pacing back and forth, his hands locked behind his back. OK, he thought. *Go.* Go to hell and gone and fuck yourself. Nobody else would. Not even Blau, the ugly bastard.

I don't need you. I don't need *anybody*. I don't need Peggy O'Brien, the acrobatic fornicator. Fornicators and fellators are a dime a dozen. I don't even need Dolores Muñoz, the rotten corpse, the Red Virgin. He laughed. That's a hot one. *Santa Dolores, la Virgen Roja.*

He lifted the decanter and drank from its mouth. Alcohol is the opium of the people. Communism is the opium of the people. *People* are the opium of the people. But not *me!* Me, they don't screw. Me, they don't put in jail. Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your brains.

He glanced at the calling card in the center drawer of his desk and with difficulty dialed a number. When someone answered, he said, "Phelps Billings. Francis Lang is calling."

9

February-April 1939

Ben and Ellen Gross were married in City Hall and Mrs. Fuchs cried all the way through the brief ceremony as though she were attending her daughter's funeral. She knew the score, Ben felt. He had no money, no prospects, not even a job. But the happiness of the pair made them practically oblivious to Mrs. Fuchs' grief, and the next day Ben went to see Leo and "borrowed" a summer cottage his brother owned in the Ramapo Mountains near the New Jersey border. He got a leave of absence from his party branch.

It was mid-winter but they both wanted to get away—and they took the baby with them—and the cottage didn't cost anything aside from the food they bought in a little store on the highway and carried in to it.

Ben had the contract, and Leo was happy about it. He had made Ben a wedding present of a hundred dollar bill and offered to furnish a flat for them when they got back. Ben said it wouldn't be necessary. He had been riding on air ever since he saw Chadwick of Peabody Sons.

When they met, Ben immediately understood why Zav had called him a dessicated codfish; he looked like one. But he was a shrewd specimen and he pumped Ben for two hours before he felt that it was safe to say, "Francis Lang is pretty much impressed by you, young man. And I trust his judgment."

But it wasn't Lang's judgment he trusted, Ben knew. It was his own. And two days later he had the contract, calling for a total advance of seven hundred and fifty dollars to be paid at the rate of thirty-five dollars a week. He also had a title, boldly lifted from the masthead of the brigade's front-line newspaper: *Volunteer for Liberty,* and the book was building itself inside his mind by the time the three of them got off the spur-line train with their suitcases, Ben's portable phonograph and portable typewriter, the baby's gear, and had hired a man to take them to the cottage.

"*Meshugeneh,*" Mrs. Fuchs had cried, "to take a baby to the country in the winter. She will die of ammonia!" But Ben had a roaring fire going in the fireplace within five minutes, and there was also a chunk-stove in the shed which he lugged out and connected up, and then they sat down and looked at each other and laughed like mad.

From the porch they could see a fine rock hill that a neighboring farmer told them was infested with rattlesnakes in the summer. An occasional deer appeared outside the shack and there was a light growth of trees around the cottage that shielded it from the bitter winds and the snow.

The two of them established a routine of physical work: walking (with the baby bundled in a sort of papoose's bag that Ben rigged up), cutting wood, sawing and splitting it, cleaning up the place. They took turns cooking for each other. They listened to the regular news broadcasts on the radio and any musical program they could find.

Ben started to write without so much as making an outline. He felt terribly apologetic about it at first, but Ellen smiled and said, "Men must work, and women must weep. And there's little to earn and many to keep."

"Who wrote that?"

"I can't remember," Ellen said. "Get to work, you lazy lout."

So Ben started to write what was to be, in essence, an exercise in free association. The form, he knew, would dictate itself out of the content that was overflowing from his heart.

Waking or sleeping, Ben was living through Spain all over again and the intensity of his concentration disconcerted Ellen from the start. He still had repeated nightmares about Joe Faber and she invariably woke him up and they snapped on the light and talked about it.

"I'm really trying to lay Joe's ghost, on paper," said Ben. "I shouldn't be having these dreams any more, with you here with me, Ellen."

She held him in her arms and said, "You meant a lot to each other, Ben. It will go away, believe me."

But the news on the radio made it impossible to keep Spain out of mind. The newspapers he picked up at the gas-station on the highway every day were full of it. And weekly, when Peabody's check arrived in the mail, he found clippings that Chadwick had enclosed that he would not otherwise have seen.

"You know," Ben said, "writing this book I keep feeling I'm in a race against time. I don't know why."

Actually, he felt that he was, in a way, engaged in the practice of black magic: if he could write the book fast enough and well enough, perhaps Spain would *not* be lost!

"Lang was right," he told Ellen. "He told me last December that a deal was in the making."

Then it broke. Madrid, which had never been stormed in more than two and a half years of fighting, was suddenly surrendered on March 28.

That was the day Ben almost suggested that they should return to New York. It was the first time since they had been married that he felt lonely—even with Ellen beside him. He didn't tell her what he felt for he decided that the very emotion was, in a sense, a betrayal, and he was ashamed of it. But he wanted to talk to somebody, almost anybody who was closer to Spain than Ellen could ever be.

He recalled the song they used to sing when they were marching: "And we will *Franco* . . . his ranks de*molish* . . . the great Miaja *leads* us on . . . and on our *rifles* . . . depends our *free*dom . . . *no pasaran, no pasaran!*"

And out of his memory there arose all the men and women he had known: the soldiers and the civilians and the peasants—particularly the peasants.

Ben wrote like mad for hours at a time and Ellen, alone with the baby, listened to the typewriter in the other room and thought, This means more to him than I do. So soon. So early! Or am I being fair to him? No, I'm not. How could it be otherwise? How could a man who lived through such a thing shuck it off as a snake shucks its dead skin and emerges shining and brilliant in its new colors? When he gets it out of his system, it will be different.

So she swore to herself that she would help him get it out of his system. She would share it with him as much as possible, suffer it with him, help him slough off the old skin. She would wrap him day and night in her love, in the perfection of their physical adjustment, which was a minor miracle to her. She would feed him with her devotion and her understanding and make up to

him for what he had lost and left behind in the strange foreign country she too loved without ever having seen it.

With corrosive bitterness, Ben read the story in the *New York Times* to Ellen late that month. "Listen to this," he said, his lips curling in contempt.

"The new Pope has addressed a pastoral letter to the Spanish Catholic Church. It was read from all the pulpits last Sunday." He spit in the fireplace and then continued:

" 'With great joy, we address you, dearest sons of Catholic Spain, to express our pastoral congratulations for the gift of peace and victory with which God has chosen to crown the Christian heroism of your faith and charity, proved in so much and so generous suffering.' How do you like *that!*" he said.

Ellen shook her head. Ben could see before his eyes that famous photograph of Franco, Mola and the Princes of the Church standing on the steps of the cathedral: the fat, corrupt faces, the gross bodies, the arms raised in the fascist salute.

He remembered that interview with Franco in July 1936, when it looked as though his uprising had been aborted by the violent resistance of the people in the big cities, and he was asked:

"How long . . . is the massacre to go on?"

To which he replied: "There can be no compromise, no truce. I shall go on preparing my advance to Madrid. I shall advance, I shall take the capital. I shall save Spain from Marxism at whatever cost."

Question: "That means that you will have to shoot half Spain?"

Answer: "I repeat, at whatever cost."

And now the massacre had begun. And the new Pope, just like the old Pope . . .

"But *listen* to this," said Ben, " 'We give to you, our dear sons of Catholic Spain, to the head of the State and his illustrious government, to the zealous Episcopate and its self-denying clergy, to the heroic combatants, and to all the faithful, our Apostolic Benediction.' "

Our Apostolic Benediction! Self-denying clergy. Christ's Vicar on Earth. Spain was lost and Czechoslovakia had been occupied a week and a half earlier, sold down the river by Great Britain and France. What was coming next? Was it hard to guess?

Lang had said it in Madison Square Garden: "Mark my words; the world is marching to Armageddon, and what we have seen in Spain . . . will be repeated upon the capital cities of the so-called democratic world."

"Something tells me," said Ellen with a faint smile, "that you're anti-Catholic."

"Something tells you right," Ben said vehemently.

"That's wrong of you, Ben," she said, "and you know it."

"I'm not anti-Catholic," said Ben. "I'm anti-Church."

"Are you being honest with yourself? Don't forget, most of the Spanish people are Catholics, too."

"Sure," said Ben. "And they've been burning down their churches for centuries. Why?"

"You know why," said Ellen.

"And in Italy and Ireland, Mexico, too—"

"That's not the point," she said. "The point is that your hatred of the church is likely to lead you to hating the people."

Ben sat and thought about that for awhile. She was right, of course. His impatience with all people who still accepted religion could easily lead him astray. What the hell sort of understanding of history did he have, if he couldn't understand why religion was still necessary to so many people? Including his own mother who had felt badly because Ben and Ellen had not been married by a rabbi. (And you wondered why the *mezzuzah* was still on Leo's door!)

"I'll think about that, *querida,*" said Ben.

"You know, Ellen," he said. "I forgot to write to Zav about us. And you've got to meet him, too."

Ben was feeling better about Lang's being a party member and he chided himself for having been so smug as to wonder whether he really belonged in the organization. After all, it was an organization of human beings with all their failings, all their weaknesses (look at his own!), their hesitancies, misunderstandings and confusions. It was not an organization of archangels.

He wrote to him that night, saying: *We—my bride and I—the girl your "woman's intuition" told you about that afternoon—have retired (temporarily) to our broad acres (my brother's one and a half, that is) to rest and contemplate our navels (nice work if you can get it). But it won't last long. Neither of us is Henry David Thoreau and this is no Walden and besides we don't know how to make pencils and besides Eberhardt Faber (no relation to Joe) probably has a monopoly on them.*

How's the play coming? Send us a copy of the book (her name is Ellen and she has *dark eyes); we will remit. Your friend Chadwick gave me a contract and I'm writing the book, thereby neglecting my bride and our baby* (her *baby, that is, and a beauty, too). Enclosed please find* $10 *on account of the* $100 *you advanced me. Regards to your own lovely wife. We are luckier than either of us deserves to be. Salud! Ben.*

When Italy invaded Albania the first week in April Ben decided

that they really ought to get back to the city; that even writing the book was a form of self-indulgence he could not afford. They needed to get back among people. Living in this warm, insulated cocoon was sweet and wonderful, but there was something about the countryside that always seduced you into forgetting that the world of human beings was not as beautiful as their habitat.

But the countryside won out. It seduced them both, for the first warmth of spring tempted them to stay a week; then another week, and then another. And the book was growing rapidly.

Ellen supplied the excuse that Ben did not have the courage to advance himself. She said he could not leave the Ramapos till it was done. The pussywillows and forsythias were budding and the hideous but somehow beautiful skunk-cabbage was thrusting its horns through the mold and jack-in-the-pulpit and Solomon's Seal could be found (*Set me as a seal upon thine heart; as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave* . . .) And by the last week in April there was a very warm spell and the peepers came out and sang like sleighbells in the hollow.

After the baby was asleep, Ben and Ellen went out with a flashlight and managed to capture a few of the tiny tree frogs. He put them in a Mason jar in the front room and they watched them for an hour. They were unbelievable in the delicacy of their structure, the bursting life which animated them. No more than half as long as a thumb, they were complete and perfect creatures with brilliant eyes, a marvelously organized and shrewdly adapted organism, but far more than an organism: the were *alive*.

Ben turned to Ellen, and she grasped what he was feeling without his saying a word. "They're alive," she said. He nodded. They were both embarrassed to have no words to express their appreciation of the miracle of life that pulsed within these little beings.

He took her in his arms and said, "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned."

"You do love me, don't you?" said Ellen and Ben said, "No, I *am* you. You are me. We are each other. I never dreamed such a thing was possible. Oh," he said, "I dreamed it all right, but I never believed it."

In a burst of energy he finished the last twenty pages of the manuscript. They boarded up the cottage, closed the portable phonograph and put the records and books and what clothes they had brought into their suitcases and went back to New York.

In Sidney Place in Brooklyn they found a furnished flat in a brownstone house and installed themselves. It was a home. They

agreed without discussing it to let Jack Gross have the furniture of Ellen's former home, for Ben was sensitive enough as it was that a weekly check had been arriving for Ellen while they were away.

Then Gross himself came every Sunday to see the baby and deliver the money for her support in person, and Ben met him. Gross was a handsome man and Ben immediately felt self-conscious. Jack was reserved and polite, but his hostility was obvious. He took the baby Ellen out in her stroller, or drove her in his car to Prospect Park and spent the day with her, delivering her promptly at the time agreed upon.

The morning they had left the Ramapos the British House of Commons voted conscription.

"Do you think there'll be a war?" said Ellen.

"Certainly."

"Do you think we'll be involved?"

"Of course."

"What will you do?" she said and when he said "Enlist," she dropped the conversation. He had not given the answer any thought at all; it was immediate.

Ben delivered the manuscript to Chadwick, who expressed astonishment at the speed with which he had finished the job and said he would call Ben as soon as he had read it.

On Saturday a book arrived for Ben, forwarded from his old address on Pineapple Street. It was a copy of Francis X. Lang's *Madrid Will Be* — and the flyleaf bore an inscription in a flowing hand that read: *For Ben Blau, who lived it; and who will live to see the rest of the slogan come to life. Salud y cojones! Francis X. Lang. New York. April* 14, 1939. *8th Anniversary of the Republic!*

Ben wondered why he hadn't also inscribed it to Ellen, but she didn't comment on it. He promptly called Zav's number but was told it had been disconnected. He wrote a note thanking him for the book.

"Ellen," he said, hanging up the phone, "the World's Fair opens tomorrow. Do you think we could get Mama to stay with little Ellen so we could go?"

"I imagine so," she said.

"We could see the Soviet pavilion they're talking so much about."

"Why not?" she smiled. Then she grew serious. "Ben," she said. "do you want me to join the party?"

"Natch," he said, "if you want to."

"Why didn't you ask me?"

"I didn't know how you felt about it."

"I don't know how I feel about it myself," she said. "Could I attend a meeting, do you think?"

Ben grinned and said in a mock-conspiratorial manner, "I'll send a cable to Moscow and find out."

"*Do* that," she said and kissed him.

10

May-August 1939

The telegram read: MSS MAGNIFICENT. PLAN SEPTEMBER PUBLICATION. PLEASE CALL ME. CHADWICK.

Ben and Ellen danced around the flat and she sent him packing to see the editor, who praised his work extravagantly and said there were only a few changes he would like to see made. The profanity used by the soldiers in Spain, for example.

"They used it," Ben said defensively and Chadwick smiled.

"There's a difference between art and life, Ben. This sort of thing could limit the sale of your book in the lending libraries. Many people are offended by it."

Ben's immediate impulse was to say, I won't change a word, a comma, but he sighed and said, "So, use asterisks," and Chadwick nodded.

"I don't mind telling you," he said, "that I care a great deal more for this book than my associates do." Ben looked up. "I'm a Republican myself, and you've got some pretty radical stuff in here."

"That I *won't* change," Ben said vehemently.

Chadwick smiled and his normally wrinkled face folded up in a spectacular fashion. "I didn't ask you to," he said drily. "I really believe in freedom of speech and the press. But some of my colleagues don't share *my* radical ideas."

Ben caught the implication; the publisher would not push the book, but having signed a contract would abide by it. He nodded. Chadwick was absolving himself in advance. He wanted Ben to know who would be responsible if there wasn't a big advertising appropriation.

"Zav has some pretty hot stuff in his book," Ben said and Chadwick nodded.

"He can afford it," he said.

"I'll start revision and polishing right away," said Ben and the editor said, "Well, you wrote this thing so fast, the weekly checks will be coming for another three months." He was aware of how

his remarks had affected Ben, so he put one hand on his shoulder and said, "I've rarely read a better piece of work, Ben. Cheer up. It's literature."

Cheer up, Ben thought as he left the editor. What the hell was there to be so cheerful about so far as the book was concerned? It was a dead duck even before the critics got a chance to snipe at it.

Two weeks later Ellen was invited to attend a party meeting, which was held in their flat on Sidney Place. The world situation was coming to a boil and Ben thought the discussion that night would be an apt one for her to participate in.

Over and over every day he was reminded of the conversation he had had with Ed Busch in the compartment of the sealed train between Bourg-Madam and Paris. "We'll get home just in time to be drafted into the American army," Ed had said. Well, the time schedule might be somewhat off, but there could be no doubt of the way things were moving.

The first week in May, Hitler and Mussolini announced a military and political alliance. The third week the alliance was signed in Berlin. The build-up of armaments in Germany and Italy mounted so fast that you would have had to be either blind or an accessory before the fact not to recognize the validity of every Marxist analysis that had been made of fascism.

Litvinov, who had used the forum of the moribund League of Nations for years to call for collective security in the face of the fascist danger, resigned. He was replaced by Molotov. In far-off Manchukuo there were "border clashes" between Japanese and Soviet troops quartered near Lake Bor. The papers might call them skirmishes, but men were being killed every day.

The discussion in the party branch the night Ellen attended dealt with the developing international crisis. The comrades agreed that despite Ethiopia, despite the lessons of Spain and Albania, the rape of Czechoslovakia and the endless Japanese war against China, the vast majority of the American people remained inert.

The comrades felt they had understood the significance of the Munich deal: an attempt on the part of Britain and France (with the passive acceptance, if not the actual connivance of the USA) to turn Hitler toward the East. "It means peace in our time," Chamberlain had said, and his umbrella became a symbol within the week of his return to London.

How to alert the people to what was going on; how to turn their basic loathing of Nazism into the sort of organized pressure that would guarantee an end to the appeasement of aggression? Roosevelt's "Quarantine the Aggressors" speech had been fine when

he had made it, but it not been implemented by American action in Spain or anywhere else.

"How did you like the meeting?" Ben said after the other comrades had left and they were alone.

"Fine," said Ellen with a wry smile. "But it was over my head, I'm afraid."

"Nonsense," said Ben. "You arrived at all our ideas independently long before I met you." (He was shy of mentioning the fact that she had told him herself that the conflict between her ideas and those of her former husband had been responsible for the divorce.)

"That's true," she said, "but I couldn't seem to open my mouth. I had nothing to contribute."

"Standard operating procedure," said Ben. "It happens to everyone at first. The comrades use too much of the jargon anyhow. If you'd opened up it would have been a refreshing change for us. You will."

"Do you still want me to join?"

"Do you want to?"

"I want to share all your experiences, Ben."

"Nuts," said Ben. "You want to live your own life, don't you mean?"

"Yes," she said. She sat quietly for a time, then said, "You know, I wondered watching you conduct the meeting and listening to you, whether I could ever be as deeply involved in the movement as you are. Your intensity scared me a little."

Ben laughed. "You're involved already, baby. Even if you don't know it."

"What're you going to do when the Peabody checks run out?" she suddenly said, and he frowned.

"I haven't thought of it," he said.

He was on the *New Masses'* panel of speakers and the demand for speakers was at its peak those days. He spoke three and four times a week in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx—even in Connecticut. And he generally picked up a five or ten dollar bill for the evening. Sometimes Ellen went with him, but most of the time she stayed home with the baby, not wanting to put too great a burden on her mother.

In July they got a letter from Francis Lang, summering near Doylestown, Pennsylvania. It amused them both—and infuriated Ben. Lang's book was on the best-seller lists and the Book of the Month Club had distributed it.

Mazeltov! he wrote. *It is better to marry than to burn— I; Paul, Corinthians. Why don't you two* novias (*and the baby*) *come down*

here and luxuriate instead of sweltering in New York or wherever the hell you are? We have a fine old house where you can loaf and invite your soul (as well as contemplate each others' navels), and Anne and I would like to lay eyes on the gal who tied down the flaming Blau.

We still have some Pilsener Urquell in the cellar and the cellar is ice-cold. The play goes into rehearsal next month for a September opening. Chadwick sent me your galleys and I don't hesitate to say that if I could write like this, I would have a much higher opinion of myself. This is great stuff, Ben—incisively thought out, passionately expressed.

"What the hell's he doing in Bucks County, inviting his soul?" Ben said to Ellen. "The world's going to hell in a wheelbarrow." What sort of party membership did he hold, Ben asked himself, and what the hell was he doing anyhow?

"As you say yourself," said Ellen, "it's nice work if you can get it."

"Sure," said Ben. "But he should be thundering in the public prints. He should get on the radio somehow or other—with *his* reputation—and shout from the housetops!"

"He did it," said Ellen, "in Madison Square Garden."

"Yeah," said Ben. "But once isn't enough and those people all agreed with him even before he opened his mouth."

"His book is good, isn't it?"

"It's good," said Ben. "We'll see about the play. But one of the troubles with our movement, Ellen, is that we talk to ourselves too much. We're almost afraid to associate with people who disagree with us. It's like taking in each others' washing. It's a form of incest. When we have a man like Lang, who—"

"Is he a party member?"

"Sure."

"I didn't know."

"Practically nobody else knows, either," said Ben.

"Maybe he wouldn't have so much influence if they did," said Ellen.

"Maybe," he said. Then, on an impulse, "I'll write to him.

We're working hard in town. What are you doing besides luxuriating and bathing in Pilsener? Your book's doing fine, I see, and I only hope that the people who read it will put two and two together and understand that it's not enough to lament over the fate of Spain.

You should be crying: Beware the Plague! This is the time, Zav, when every voice that can command an audience should be heard loud in the land. We're going to have a war on our hands in no time, or I miss my guess. And that friend of yours who lives in the

big white house doesn't seem to be doing too much to stop it. Or maybe we don't want *to do anything. Maybe "we" like it this way.*

Thanks for the kind words about Volunteer. *I don't expect to cut into your sales, and I understand now what you meant when you said you could print that kind of stuff, but I couldn't.*

I'm not worried about that for the moment. I'm worried about what's going to happen. Give me the benefit of that crystal ball you pack around in your brief-case, will you? Salud! *Ben.* (He bought and enclosed a final money order for ten dollars, the last installment on the hundred Zav had loaned him. It made him feel good.)

Ben discovered to his astonishment that there were certain things he could not say to his wife of four months, or at least, there was no way to communicate them. He had married late, at twenty-nine. He had thought for years that perhaps he was not cut out for love, and here he was married and the father of a ready-made family. He was mad about the dainty little girl, who was almost two years old and who had taken to him with a spontaneity that wrung his heart.

"Are you happy?" Ellen said and he bent his head and looked at her. He could not see her face.

"More than I've ever been in my life," he said, truthfully.

"Then why do I feel you're not happy tonight?" Ellen said, sitting up and looking at him.

"But I *am, querida,*" he said.

She shook her head. "I haven't known you long," she said, "but I know you awfully well."

"And what do you see, Madame Clairvoyante?"

"You're more concerned about the other people in the world than you are about yourself, about us, aren't you?"

"In a way, yes," he said. "In a way, no." She was gazing at him intently, and he continued. "Most of the people in the world don't have what we have, darling."

"That's true, and you're trying to do what you can about it, aren't you? It should make you happy."

"What I can do—and *we* can do—is little enough, *mia guapa.*"

But there were moments on Hill 666, he told himself, when it was impossible to think: I'm fighting for the survival of decency in Spain and in the world, for the right of the people to expand the necessities of life into the small luxuries that make the difference between mere survival and actual living.

"But you do have faith," said Ellen.

"It doesn't rest on faith alone," he said. "It rests on knowledge as sound as the fact that hydrogen and oxygen combine to make water.

"I've heard that said," said Ellen, "but I never understood it. That's one reason I don't think I'm ready to join the party."

"Ellen," he said, "nobody needs to *prove* that the exploitation of millions of people by hundreds of people is morally wrong, and if you study history you'll discover soon enough that the system under which we live is on its death-bed and should be helped from the death-bed to the grave."

Was that the answer a comrade would give, Ben thought now, a German or Italian comrade, let's say, or a Spanish comrade in Spain tonight, if he were asked: "How did you survive the beatings and the starvation, how did you manage to live through the extraction of your fingernails, the mass rape, the drilling of your teeth, the application of a blow-torch to your bare breasts, the searing of your genitals with a live wire? What sustained you? What made it possible for you to sink into unconsciousness (or death) rather than give the easy answer, tell the names, write down the addresses, dictate the tables of organization of the underground movement in Berlin, in Rome, in Saragossa or in Tokio?"

Ben sat looking at the poster with the stunning face of the pilot, his goggles thrown back on his forehead, smiling at the climbing *echelon* of planes. And Ellen looked at him and felt, It *does* mean more to him than I mean to him. Even from his own standpoint, that's wrong and must be changed. For he told me that there could be no separation between theory and practice, that a man cannot love his class unless he loves his woman, truly, deeply, with no equivocation and no condescension and no reservations.

The answer, Ben was thinking. Would the scientist stand up to torture for his formula H^2O? Or would he do what Galileo did after he whispered to his friend, *É pur si muove!* He recanted, didn't he, *after* he had said, "Nevertheless, it *does* move!"

I would gladly swear that hydrogen and oxygen combined to make pure Pilsener rather than accept torture, since they make water anyhow! Why, then, would I rather have died than run away from Hill 666 or betray my comrades into prison or the torture chamber?

I'll have to *do* something about this, Ellen thought. I love him far too much to lose him...

The first week in August Zav began to commute to New York from Doylestown to attend rehearsals of his play, *Better to Die.*

He dropped a note to the Blaus, telling them where the rehearsals were taking place and suggesting they might be interested in watching them, but Ben replied with a brief note that he would be unable to attend, as he was working during the day in the *New Masses* office. So they did not see each other.

Despite his understanding that a Communist was not only a person who agreed with the program of the party, but who attended

meetings of his branch, paid his dues, participated in the deliberations of the group and contributed to mutual understanding and agreement on the many aspects of political and social life with which the party was concerned, Lang thought of himself as a member-at-large.

He had attended only two or three meetings, where he had been distressed to discover that the other members were nowhere nearly so well-informed as he was himself. Neither were they "brilliant" in the way he had expected them to be. It was easy to defeat them in argument or to adduce arguments for which they had no ready answers. It was difficult to respect some of them, who were obviously "little people" in the sense of the phrase he particularly loathed.

When he had gone to Bucks County he therefore attended no further meetings. When he returned to attend rehearsals of his play, he did not resume contact with his group, nor did he have any particular misgivings about this, for he had already decided that his best contribution to the movement would come through his play, his book, his articles and the lectures he was frequently asked to give to ladies' clubs, literary circles and businessmen's organizations.

In these environs he was automatically looked up to and respected in a way he had not found in the party itself. In the branch his achievements and experience were respected but his arguments were always met on the basis of their validity (or lack of it) and nobody stood in awe of him. In fact, he discovered that he was forced to remain silent a large part of the time when questions of political economy were discussed, for he understood relatively little about it. He bought a book on political economy but found it rough going, so he went to the "source"—*Das Kapital* (in the original), and after the first volume he found it impossible to understand at all.

What need was there for all this theory, he argued with himself, when anybody with a grain of common sense could see what was going on in the world and knew black from white and right from wrong? At this point he decided that his artistic soul was a far more reliable guide to action than his scientific mind. He also decided that he did not really understand himself at all and resolved to spend more time in actual meditation, with typewriter at hand. He would also keep a journal, a pocket notebook, and put down the endless play of thought and impulse that washed over his conscious mind at every hour of the day and night, drunk or sober. *What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty!...*

"Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison connait pas," he quoted to himself.

The next morning—it was August 21 and he had spent the weekend in town—Lang was awakened by the telephone. It was Station WOR asking if he had read the morning papers. He was annoyed and said, "I never read the morning papers till noon. Why?"

"Germany and Russia have signed a non-aggression pact," the program manager, a man named Peel, informed him. "We're asking a number of famous people like yourself to chew this one over at eight tonight. Sort of a unrehearsed forum. No holds barred. Particularly want you. Can *do?*"

"I'd be delighted," he said.

"Be here around seven, will you? We'd like to get the people warmed up for about half an hour before we go on the air."

Zav got out of bed and took a long, hot bath—soaking first and making notes on the pad he always kept on a stool beside the tub. Who'd the guy say they were going to have? Wilhelmina Patton, the famous syndicated columnist. Well, Willie was always fun in an argument and there was no doubt what she would have to say. She hated the Soviet Union's guts, probably because she hadn't given birth to it.

Then there was the military commentator Colonel Hugo Faulkner, who hadn't smelled powder since 1917 and precious little of it then; and there was good old Clem Elliman who had just come back from Germany, no less, and would probably turn up with a bottle of Jameson.

Lang spent the day in his library, digging through a bale of books and pamphlets, making notes. He called Anne in Doylestown and told her he was sorry he hadn't come down during the weekend, but they were getting close to the out-of-town opening and were holding night rehearsals.

She sounded disappointed and wanted to know why he hadn't called on Friday. She had been worried all weekend and hadn't been able to reach him on the phone. "It's simple, darling," he said. "I was at the theater both nights till after midnight, and when I came home I was utterly bushed and took the receiver off the hook. Yesterday—"

"Never mind," she said.

"Annie," he said, "I'm on the radio tonight at eight. Listen to WOR. Panel discussion on the agreement the Soviets signed with Nazi Germany."

"What do you make of it?" she said and he said, "Listen at eight. I'll be talking right *at* you, pie-face. You and nobody else."

Her voice softened and she said, "Why did you marry me, Frank? Could it be because you loved me?"

"It was your bank account."

"It wasn't my intellect."

"It was your fair white body," he said. "It was your beautiful heart-shaped bottom—callipygous. It was your—"

"Frank!" she said, "you're on the telephone!"

"I'll see you this weekend," he said. "Promise. A week away from you has got me frustrated. I've built up a terrific head of steam. Did you ever read that novel, 'The Passionate Lover,' by the famous Russian writer, E. Nawdor Titsoff?"

"Stop *talking* like that," she said.

"OK," he said. "Behave yourself. And stop sleeping with that Mennonite farmer down the road. I don't like hay in my bed."

"Frank!" she said, and he chuckled and said, "Goodbye and don't forget to listen. I'm about to straighten everybody out on the latest developments in foreign affairs."

That ought to hold her for awhile, he thought and hung up...

There was a violent argument in the cafeteria down the street from the *Daily* that noon and Ben didn't participate in it. He was forced to listen because he was suddenly aware that he couldn't formulate his ideas fast enough to engage in the debate.

There were those who said, "Well, what're you going to say about *this* one?" There were those who claimed to know immediately what it meant and were sounding off. But they didn't sound too convincing.

Then there was the cautious voice which said, "We haven't got all the facts. Let's wait and see. I'm willing to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt."

At that point one guy got up and said, "Well, I'm *not!* You can explain it all you want, but no matter how you slice it, it's still baloney! The Soviet Union doesn't collaborate with the Nazis. It's done it. That's enough for *me!* I'm through."

Ben couldn't deny that he was shaken and so were those who were doing all the fine explaining. Any way you looked at it, it was hard to understand unless—and this was a reasonable assumption—most of the factors were still unknown—like an iceberg, mostly under water. I won't accept this, Ben thought, till somebody explains it to me in terms that I can understand. Right now, I don't understand it. It goes against everything I've come to believe about the Soviets.

"This is dialectics," one guy was saying, "dialectics of the purest ray serene. And if you can't grasp it, then what've you been *doing* all these years? Not thinking at *all?* Have you swallowed everything on faith or have you done what you're supposed to do every day of the week? Study, think, examine, question, learn."

Ben decided to go home and do some thinking. Certainly you

couldn't accept what the commercial press was saying about the thing. Maybe between Ellen and himself, they could talk it out...

It didn't take more than a few minutes of warm-up for Zav to discover that all the participants in the forum (with the possible exception of Elliman) were outraged by the Pact, and he would be obliged to defend the policy of the Soviet Union if anyone were going to throw some light into all the heat that had been generated.

Wilhelmina Patton led off with a blistering denunciation of the Russians, her rage having a devastating effect on the pear-shaped tones she had trained herself for so many years to emit. She fingered her long string of pearls as she spoke, and said, "There was a time when many misguided people believed that the Russian experiment portended good for the people of that nation. *I* never did.

"Events of the last twenty-four hours, however," she intoned like the Voice of Doom, "have blasted that illusion, if it still existed anywhere in the world. The Russian leaders have betrayed not only their own wretched people, but also the people of the entire civilized world."

She ignored the moderator's signal to wind up and give someone else a chance. "Hitler and Stalin," she said, "have formed an alliance. An alliance directed against the Western world. And if Christian civilization as we know it is to survive in the face of the preponderant weight of their armaments, it will take the combined might of every democratic nation on earth to overcome them."

"Well now," said Colonel Faulkner, cutting in without so much as an apology and getting a withering stare from Wilhelmina, "I'm not so much impressed by what our distinguished columnist, Miss Patton, seems to fear—the Red Army. Everyone knows that in the purges that have been going on there, the bloody dictator Stalin killed off the only generals capable of leading his army.

"Of course this so-called non-aggression pact *is,* as our distinguished commentator has said, a crass betrayal of everything the democratic nations stand for. It has put us on notice that we can expect no help from Stalin, should Hitler decide to move against the West. Don't you think so, Mr. Elliman?" he said, turning to Clem, who had a paper cup in front of him on the table. "You've just come back from Germany."

Elliman took a sip from the cup, his red beard bristling. He said, "I have no politics, as the Spanish have a way of putting it. True, I just came back from Germany, and it's a fact that the country is simply swarming with armed, uniformed men."

He took the last gulp from his cup and said, "I'd like to put in my two cents worth a little later in this discussion, and I think we

ought to hear from Francis Lang, who *is* a political man with a political mind and has made a first-hand study of the currents of history of which we're all such helpless pawns. That's a mixed metaphor," he added. "I hope nobody minds."

"Well," said Lang, "I see I'm in a minority of one here, for I'm obliged by the logic of events to defend the Soviets in signing this agreement."

"How dare *any* man—" said Wilhelmina Patton and the moderator cut in with, "I'll let you have at him, Miss Patton, in just a moment."

"Willie's an aggressive lady," Lang said and they all laughed, Wilhelmina the loudest. "But I'd like to get a couple things straight here. First, this is *not,* as she said, an alliance. It's an agreement on the part of Germany and the Soviet Union not to attack each other."

"You're twisting words—" Miss Patton said and the moderator rapped his small gavel and she stopped talking.

"How much such an agreement is worth on Hitler's part," said Lang, "I wouldn't know. Not much, I imagine. On the other hand, if things are the way Colonel Faulkner thinks they are in the Soviet Union, I doubt very much if the Russians are ready to take him on, or particularly eager to do so.

"Point Two. Everybody seems to have forgotten—or at least no one has mentioned it—that the Soviet leaders have been negotiating since March of this year with British and French representatives, for some sort of a mutual security agreement—"

"Yes," said Colonel Faulkner, "and they turn around now and stab Britain and France in the back!"

"Hear! Hear!" said Miss Patton.

"From what I've been able to learn," said Francis Lang, "these negotiators—on the French and British side—aren't even empowered by their governments to sign an agreement, if one should be reached. Furthermore—"

"That's an assumption," said Miss Patton...

Ben tuned the radio better and listened carefully. He had turned it on, to find out what the commentators were saying. Ellen was putting the little girl to bed. They had had a quarrel about the Pact.

"I've taken the trouble," Lang's voice went on, "to dig up a few other facts that nobody else seems to have mentioned. Clem, you were in Spain and Willie, excuse me, Miss Patton, you were a partisan of the Spanish Republic.

"Surely you've not forgotten that neither Britain nor France—nor America for that matter—lifted a finger to assist the Spanish

people in that crucial fight; that Germany and Italy were the aggressors there and that the only major power in the world willing to sell arms to a legitimate government was the Soviet Union."

"So what?" said Wilhelmina.

"I'd hazard a guess," said Colonel Faulkner, "that the Russians had their own fish to fry in that mess."

"That *is* an assumption," said Lang, "unsupported by any facts, and both Clem and I were there for well over a year."

"What does *that* prove, even assuming it's true?" Patton demanded.

"I take it only as an index of the Soviet Union's sincerity when she says, as she has for years through Litvinov and other spokesmen, that she wants collective security, stands for peace and supports the aspirations of other nations seeking independence."

(This is good, Ben thought.)

"How naive can you get?" said Patton.

"I'll *show* you," said Lang, with some venom. "We're certainly aware that Britain, France and our own government stood aside and did nothing when Mussolini attacked Ethiopia and Albania, when Hitler absorbed Austria and Czechoslovakia, and we also know how much American money went into building up the war machine that Hitler's brandishing today. How naive can *you* get?"

"Get to the point, sir," said Patton. "Get to the point."

"The point is this," said Lang. "Faced with an obvious desire on the part of the great democracies to let Hitler build his war machine, and faced with no results in getting a collective security agreement, the Soviet leaders have done the next best thing—signed a pact—for what it may be worth—with the Nazis themselves, to stave off war and get a breathing spell—"

"Nonsense!" said Patton. "They've done no such thing. Stalin has made it plain exactly what he thinks of us—"

"Here he is," said Lang. "Here's Stalin speaking last March at the Eighteenth Congress of the Communist Party. *Listen* to him. I quote '...certain European and American politicians and newspaper writers, having lost patience waiting for "the march on the Soviet Ukraine" are themselves beginning to disclose what is really behind the policy of non-intervention. They are saying quite openly, putting it down in black and white, that the Germans have cruelly "disappointed" them, for instead of marching further east, against the Soviet Union, they have turned west, you see, and are demanding colonies!' He warned that this policy of appeasement might very well blow up it our—"

"Who cares what Stalin says?" snapped Patton. "And I resent your implication that our government is culpable in this matter."

"So do I," said Colonel Hugo Faulkner. "We fought the Germans in World War I and if it comes to a showdown, we'll fight them again."

"I think Zav—I mean Mr. Lang, is off the beam," said Elliman, who had managed to pour his paper cup full under the table from the large flask he used to carry in Spain.

"In what way, Clem?"

"There was no need for the Russians to sign such an agreement," Elliman said. "Not if their boast of being the world's leading anti-fascists means anything. They've confused and bewildered the whole world by this move." He took a sip. "At least, they've confused and bewildered *me.*"

(What a birdbrain, Ben thought. But at least he's honest. He prefaced it all by saying he had no politics.)

"They may have confused *you,*" said Zav, "but I'm sure they didn't think of you when they contemplated this deal."

"Well, they should have," Elliman said. "I'm the man in the street. I'm the least common denominator. If the Russians really have our best interests at heart, as Zav implied, they owe it to me personally to convince me of it."

"Mr. Lang," Patton said coldly, "is probably the only one here who got a cable from Moscow this afternoon."

The panel members all laughed with embarrassment and the moderator said, "Your point of view is intriguing, Mr. Lang, and I'm sure we all respect it, but I was interested in what Mr. Elliman was hinting at when he said the Russians didn't have to sign this agreement. Do you agree with that?"

"It makes no difference whether I agree or not," said Lang. "I'm sure we all remember that when the young Soviet republic—whatever we may think of it today—was fighting for its life, Lenin was forced to sign a similar agreement with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk. It was certainly a lou—excuse me, disadvantageous agreement to the Soviets, but it achieved its purpose: to get the Germans off the back of the new regime."

"Yes," said Wilhelmina Patton, "and *that* is the index of their sincerity. Lenin also said that he'd sign a pact with the devil himself."

"True—if it was to the advantage of the Soviets," said Lang.

"You've proved my point!"

"Not at all," said Lang. "What *is* to the advantage of the Soviets in this instance? Peace. Time to prepare for an attack which is certainly coming. Time to build up strength which would ultimately be to our own advantage if we are forced into a fight."

Wilhelmina Patton's laughter practically blasted the microphone.

"Are you trying to tell us, Francis, that the Russians would fight on *our* side in such a war?"

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't have them," she said. "I haven't forgotten what Lindbergh said about their army and their airforce last year."

"And *I* haven't forgotten that he was decorated by Hermann Goering in 1936," said Lang.

"They wouldn't fight on our side anyhow," said Patton, "because they're totalitarians, just like the Nazis. I *know*. I've been in Germany—till they threw me out for criticizing them. I was in Russia—till they threw me out for criticizing them."

"Now just a minute," Lang said. "We seem to be getting off the point. I'm sure anybody who throws Miss Patton out is a nasty man but—"

"The point," said Clem Elliman, "is that there *is* no point. Somebody said that. I don't remember who, but he had something there. Period."

"I'm terribly sorry," said the moderator. "This has been a very stimulating discussion, I must say, but we're getting close to our time and I must thank you all for giving the listening public an opportunity—"

Ben switched off his radio and looked up Station WOR in the telephone book. He was delighted with Lang, for he had helped to clarify his own thinking. It was true, though, what Patton had said, or was it Elliman? A lot of people were going to be confused by this development, including a lot of party members. (Are you so clear about it yourself?)

"Ellen," he said as he dialed the number, "you missed it. Zav was great."

She sat down in a chair and watched him as he talked. He got Lang after a few moments' wait and said, "Zav? *Mazeltov* and *salud!*"

"Who dat?"

"Ben Blau."

"Well, thanks, Ben. I did my best."

"You ought to be on the radio regularly," Ben said. "If you need a sponsor, just call on *me*. I can put up a buck a week."

"It's an idea. When will I see you two? I want to meet your wife."

"When do you want to see us?"

"Why not drop in at the theater some night—the Booth—we're rehearsing almost every night. Getting close to the opening."

"We'd like to."

"Then *do* it—any night this week."

"Keep pitching," said Ben. "You're doing fine." He hung up and turned to Ellen. "I'm sorry you missed him."

She was serious. "I'm not," she said.

"What a silly thing to say. He explained it much better than I did this afternoon."

"He couldn't explain it to *me,*" said Ellen. "Neither could you. I'm a Jew."

"You seem to forget I'm a Jew myself," said Ben with a smile.

"No," she said. "It's *you* who've forgotten it."

"For Christ's sake, Ellen, this is a complicated business. Without all the facts at our command, how can we expect to make a judgment that will make any sense?"

"It won't make any sense no matter how many facts you have," she said.

"Don't keep saying the same thing over and over."

"You're accepting it on faith. You're not sure of it yourself," she said. "If you were, you could explain it better than you did this afternoon."

"I'm not certain, that's true. But I *am* certain that it can be explained, and I'm also certain that it was done for good reasons."

"Why? The Soviet Union can't make mistakes?"

"Certainly the Soviet Union can make mistakes," said Ben. "But it's less likely to make them than any other country in the world."

"Why?"

"Because it's a *socialist* country," said Ben. "Because nobody in that country stands to make a dime out of a war."

Ellen got up. "I'm going to bed," she said. "I don't understand it and I don't think you understand it. And I am ashamed of your being willing to make a judgment without understanding it."

"Ellen," he said, "if I believed—" but she had left the room...

At midnight, just as he was falling asleep, Lang's phone rang and he picked it up. A man's voice said, "Frank?" and he was puzzled for a moment. Who besides Anne called him *Frank?* He suddenly remembered and was wide awake.

"Yes?" he said.

"I have a message," the voice said. "From Frank."

"I understand."

"The Skipper would like to talk to you."

"When?"

"Any day this week."

"What's it about? Can you say?"

"He heard you tonight."

"Oh?" said Lang.

"He no like."

"If he no like," said Lang, "I'll come down. Let's see. This is Monday, or is it Tuesday? I'll be there Thursday morning. That OK?"

"Fine."

The man hung up and Lang slowly placed the receiver back in its cradle. He no like, he thought. Well, if he no like there must be a good reason. Better mind your P's and Q's, *Francisco.*

He called the Pennsylvania Railroad and reserved a bedroom for Wednesday night to Washington.

11

February-April 1948

When Anne Lang left the apartment on University Place, she walked to the Hotel Brevoort on Fifth Avenue and registered. Once in a room she called her maid, Clarice, and told her to pack all her clothes and have them delivered by taxi. Clarice wept on the telephone, and Anne spent a good half hour consoling her and urging her not to give up her job. The question was unresolved by the end of the conversation, and Anne told her to come to the hotel the next day if she still felt the same way, and they would have a talk about it.

She left the hotel, telling the desk clerk that her luggage would be arriving and to please have a chambermaid unpack it, and she walked halfway to the bank before she remembered it was Lincoln's Birthday. This fact upset her more than anything that had happened that day and she stood crying in the street, dabbing her nose with her handkerchief, then started slowly back to the hotel.

It would be impossible now to draw the money for Blau's bail. It would even be impossible to call the Veterans' office and assure them that someone was going to provide it.

Back at the hotel she suddenly recalled the name of Ben's lawyer, but she didn't know how to spell it. She looked through the phone book until she came to a name that looked as though it were the right one, called the residence and got Sam.

He was so surprised by the call (and by her name) that it was difficult for him to conceal his surprise, but when she had told him that she would put up the bail the next morning, he asked her to come to his office in Wall Street as soon after ten as she could,

and please to remain for lunch. She agreed. He told her he would call the secretary of the Vets at his home and let him know the bail had been raised.

She slept badly that night and felt that she looked dreadful in the morning. But this was scarcely important. She called the apartment, told Clarice that she would be out till late in the afternoon, and not to inform her husband where she was living. She did not want to talk to him nor did he ask to speak to her.

And after she had drawn the money she took a cab to the attorney's office and was shown right in. A youngish man was introduced to her by Sam—Ted Barrow, secretary of the Lincoln Veterans' organization. He told her that the VALB had raised five hundred dollars of the bail but she insisted that he should accept the entire thousand, as money would be needed for Ben's defense. Barrow's eyes and nose suddenly became red.

Then she sat in the office for two hours while Tabatchnik and Barrow went through the machinery of getting Ben released. And it was not until she saw him come through the door of the office and went to him, both hands extended, that she began to feel like herself again. But what he had to say threw her for a loss.

He took both her hands and said, "I *knew* you and Zav would come to the rescue." She was silent, and he took the silence for embarrassment and modesty, and said, "I must call him up and thank him. Is he home?"

"No . . . I don't know," she said.

"Let's eat," Sam Tabatchnik said, and Anne was relieved by the interruption. Her mind was racing, wondering how to proceed from this point on. The sudden impulse she had indulged—of putting up the bail—seemed to have initiated an action she had not quite foreseen.

As they sat down to lunch in the businessmen's bar and grill to which Sam had steered them, Ben noticed the lines of concern in her face and said, "What's troubling you?"

She smiled then and said, "Nothing, really—except of course what's likely to happen to *you*."

Ted Barrow said, "You guys were wonderful to put up the dough, and that extra five hundred will get the committee off to a fine start."

"Committee?" Anne said absently.

"We're forming a broad committee to defend Ben," Ted said. "We'd normally defend any vet who's in trouble like this, but this is different."

"How so?" said Anne.

"The government's policy is pro-Franco," said Ted. "That means

the attack on Ben is an attack on all of us—on anyone who's anti-Franco and pro-Loyalist."

Ben said, "Do you think you and Zav would be willing to be sponsors, or would you rather have your help remain anonymous?"

It's going to have to come out, Anne thought, no matter what. She said, "I'd certainly be willing to join such a committee, though I doubt that my name would carry any weight."

"Naturally," said Ted, "we'll approach Mr. Lang separately—or maybe you could ask him for us?"

Anne sighed anl looked at each of the three men before she spoke. "I couldn't speak for him," she said. "We've separated."

"Oh?" said Ben.

She turned to Tabatchnik and said with a smile, "I guess I'm in the market for a lawyer myself."

Sam frowned and Ben's mind was bubbling with questions he knew he couldn't ask. Anne helped him out.

"I don't think he'd join," she said. "In fact I'm sure of it."

Ben said, "Of course it's none of our business, Anne—do you mind if I call you that?"

"I'd be hurt if you didn't," she said, took a deep breath and plunged in. "I know very little of what goes on in Frank's mind, but I can put two and two together. He's been under great pressure since he was called the first time himself. There was a threat to cancel his program. He's had mysterious visitors he wouldn't tell me about. That much I can tell you without feeling that I've betrayed any confidences—even if we have separated."

Tabatchnik looked at her and said, "Do you think he'll be a witness against Ben?"

"I don't know," said Anne, but the men at the table understood what she could not bring herself to say. It was written all over her face.

"I can't understand this," Ben finally said. "I can't conceive of Zav appearing against me; and what's more, I can't figure out what he could possibly say that would bolster the government's case."

"Maybe he won't," said Anne. "But he has an absolute horror of being poor again."

She looked at the three men and knew that all of them were poor. Tabatchnik himself didn't look very well off and his office was scarcely impressive.

"I've never been without money myself," she said, "so I probably shouldn't be the first to cast a stone at Frank. It's difficult for me to imagine what his childhood was like, though he's described it to me by the hour. But surely that, plus his enormous success and the danger he believes he faces must be important in his mind." She

spread her hands. "I can't answer Ben's second question because I don't know what he's supposed to have said that was perjury, or what's the adjective?"

"Perjurious," said Tabatchnik.

Ben got up and went to the phone booth and called I. Klein and asked for Sue Menken. They told him she was out to lunch and he left word that Mr. Blau would be waiting for her after work. He added, "Tell her it's important; she should please wait."

"I'll tell her," some woman on the other end of the line said and snickered...

Peggy O'Brien had not exactly moved into Number One University Place, but she might just as well have. She *had* moved a few articles of clothing and some cosmetics from Morton Street, but she still maintained the apartment even though she stayed overnight with Zav as often as three times a week.

She also began to show a disposition not to work as hard as she had previously. She frequently interrupted Zav when he was dictating and insisted they should take the afternoon off or the evening. Sometimes they went flying in the Cessna 140 which he kept at Teterboro, New Jersey. More often they went out to dinner, the theater and a night club.

Learning something from the way her predecessor had reacted to Zav's drinking, she never so much as lifted an eyebrow when he was bent on getting crocked, though she did a good deal less drinking herself. (Lang never noticed.)

And she broke off with her boy friend, Eddie Warner, much to his annoyance. He had never liked the arrangement to begin with, but when she told him that she might very well marry Lang he told her she was a bitch, and he hoped she got what was coming to her. "Don't worry, honey," she had said. "I intend to."

But she felt a lot better about Zav these days; never mind the drinking. When the knot was tied, the drinking could be handled; and if it couldn't, he was loaded heavily enough to pay alimony to two wives. (She doubted that Anne would ask for alimony.)

But he was a pretty good egg, she figured, when he was sober. He was amusing. He was old enough not to be too demanding, even if he imagined he was the answer to the nymphomaniac's prayer. And now that he had apparently straightened out whatever trouble he had gotten into with the government, things were looking up.

Exactly what his trouble was she never knew, but she knew the radio program was doing fine and he wasn't as nervous as he had been. He seemed relieved to be rid of that cold fish of an Anne, and he never mentioned her. She was also aware that he was feeling

a little queasy about *her,* M.O'B. Have to handle him with kid gloves, she felt, have to gentle him along. He knows damned well I'm out to land him and he'll resist it as long as he can. Well, there were ways.

Lang was pretty busy with the program and the consultations with Phelps Billings. (He had even resumed work on the play he thought he had abandoned, but that looked like a long-term project.) But the conferences with Billings, who would try the case whenever it got to court, disturbed him.

They had simplified his role enormously, but he was beginning to feel rotten about it again. They had worked out a strategy that would present him as a reluctant witness, that would even permit him to say a kind word for the defendant (if it could be said without dragging it in by ears) and that would maintain his dignity.

He was simply the well-known foreign correspondent and student of international affairs who had been in Spain and met the right people, whose reputation for honesty could not be impeached and who would present certain hard, cold facts that could scarcely be denied.

The government attorney would carry the burden of the argument and other witnesses would be presented who would testify to the nature of the Communist Party itself.

"Do you think Blau will take the stand?" Lang said anxiously.

"I doubt it," said Billings. "And if he did, he'd scarcely make a prepossessing witness."

"You mustn't judge people by their appearance," said Lang. "He's a highly intelligent man and he could make an excellent witness, especially since he's facing a five-year sentence. And he's a fighter."

"He fought a little too hard before the committee," Billings said, "and he got caught off balance. I know Tabatchnik. I doubt if he'd let him take the stand. He's much too smart."

"I hope you're right," said Lang and added, "I don't relish this Tabatchnik's cross-examination."

"You have nothing to worry about," said Billings. "Stick to the simple facts and leave the interpretation to me."

Lang was disappointed when the judge denied a continuance to Blau's lawyer, stating that he could see no reason for any further delay, and set Monday, June 1st, for the trial date. It was only April 15th and things were popping in Europe.

The Soviet military government in Germany had imposed a blockade on Berlin and was denying entry to the American, British and French sectors of the former German capital. *The Saturday Evening Post* had asked him to fly to Berlin to write a series of articles on the affair, but he had had to turn down the assignment.

Billings wanted him to hang around. The stupid bastards, he thought. This is no way to make friends and influence people, and scarcely a day went by that the Reds didn't do or say something calculated to antagonize the very people they wanted most to influence.

What they need is a good public-relations man, Lang decided. *Me,* for example. I could do a bang-up job! But I doubt if they would pay my price, and besides, you've chosen sides, haven't you? Have I? he thought. Well, basically, yes, but do I *have* to go through with this dirty business with Blau? Isn't there some way out of it and why couldn't I tip him in advance so he could be prepared with a defense?

This idea intrigued Lang. It would be something like playing the role of a double agent, an *espión.* You have nothing against Ben as a person, he told himself. As a matter of fact, you admire him, like him.

He suddenly remembered the first really big argument he had had with Ben, in 1939, wasn't it? In which he clouted me over the head with that good old *cliché,* after I told him I had resigned from the party, and tried to get him to pull out as well.

"What the hell kind of a Communist *are* you?" Ben had said. "A carrot Communist?" And when I didn't catch on fast (I was plastered) he explained. "Red outside, white inside."

That hurt at the time but in retrospect it was pretty silly. I'm all mixed up, he thought. On the one hand you wanted badly to be a revolutionary and on the other hand you can now agree with Blau when he tagged you a phony nine years ago, and you can also agree with Dolores' characterization of you as a romantic. (My scientific mind, my artistic soul.)

To hell with it, he thought. I will *not* appear against him. I'll tell Billings I've had a change of mind. Even a woman is allowed to change her mind. Why not a man? What can they do to you?

Don't you know? his mind answered. Sure, I know. So *what?* How much have you got in the bank? Maybe fifty thousand in war bonds, maybe another forty in cash, a house in Bucks County worth twenty-five; an aircraft worth three, some stocks worth thirty more (if the market holds firm); an interest in the Dramatists' Company, a piece of the popular musical comedy—

How much will the Soviet Union pay you for publicizing the Berlin blockade and getting it a good press? He laughed out loud and went to the decanter. But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, etc., etc. *ad nauseam.* Maybe you should go back to Everett Morton, he thought. You're in a state of conflict, *verdad?*

You don't know this from that. Hamlet. *O! my prophetic soul! My uncle!* (Say uncle! say uncle!)

"Uncle!" Lang said aloud and poured the brandy. But I don't give up so easily. Once I get an idea in my head, I'm a stubborn son of a bitch. *Thus conscience does make cowards of us all! /And thus the native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, /And enterprises of great pith and moment/ With this regard their currents turn awry,/ And lose the name of action. Soft you now! /The fair* Dolores! *Nymph, in thy orisons/ Be all my sins remember'd.*

If a rat which has the brain of a rat can find its way out of a maze, then a man who has the brain of a Lang can find *his* way out of an unpleasant situation. Understatement of the century. Score one for *your* side. *How now! a rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!*

And didn't Billings say there was a grand jury looking into the party itself? That Willie Patton is not only Cassandra, but she's also the Delphic Oracle. Didn't she say, a couple years ago, The American people aren't going to tolerate the likes of you comrades much longer—to Blau himself?...

With the trial set for June first, Ben and Sam Tabatchnik sat down to discuss the strategy of the defense. What Anne had told them made it amply clear that Francis X. Lang was going to figure in the case as a government witness, and Sam had a hard time arguing Ben out of going directly to Lang and broaching him on the subject.

"Why not?" said Ben. "His appearance hasn't been announced and nobody could accuse me of tampering with a witness. I have an idea that I could talk him out of appearing."

"You don't know the pressures to which he's been subjected," Sam said. "You don't know what he testified to before the committee, both times in executive session. You don't know what they've got on him. And if he's the sort of weak fish you describe, he could just as easily be persuaded—at some later time—to distort your conversation with him so that it would appear you *had* tried to threaten him."

"OK," said Ben. "But you're *not* going to talk me out of taking the witness stand."

"I hope to," said Sam with a wry smile.

"Why? I have nothing to hide."

"You talk like a child. I didn't say you had anything to hide. I said you don't seem to be aware of the risks you run." Ben started to interrupt and Sam said angrily, "Now *listen* to me! Under our laws no witness in a criminal case is required to take the witness stand. That's the Fifth Amendment. It's not up to you to prove your

innocence. It's up to the government to prove your guilt. And the judge's required to instruct the jury that no inference of guilt or innocence may be drawn from your failure to testify."

"I don't dig you characters," said Ben. "On the one hand, you understand better than anybody else exactly whose interests the courts uphold. On the other, you talk as though you actually believed they could dispense justice—in a political case like this."

"Ben," said Tabatchnik, "nobody realizes better than I how the courts operate and whose interests they defend. But the fact of the matter is that we have to work with what we've got. We live in *this* society, not under a socialist society. You're caught in the machinery of the law. We have no recourse except to abide by the rules of the game and trust to luck that we get a just decision. It *has* happened, you know. Do you want examples?"

"No. I know about the Schneiderman decision. But that was a different period."

"There are others. And don't think you won't get a vigorous defense. The political points will be made. Don't fear."

Ben snorted. "I don't see the Committee to Defend Ben Blau becoming a mass movement, any more than the committees to defend Barsky or the rest. I'm identified with the *Daily*. It's started a big campaign."

"Lots of things can happen, Ben. And I won't try too hard to keep you off the stand. Maybe in this case it would be better. I want to think it out. But *I'm* caught in a dilemma, the same as you. I just want you to understand—if you *do* testify—the risks you'll be running."

"Risk-runner Blau, that's me," asid Ben with a grin. "I took risks in Spain every day and in World War II, and in that one I caught a burst in the legs. How do you avoid risks?"

"You don't," said Tabatchnik, "but you don't expose yourself to fire recklessly, and as an old soldier you should know it."

"We had a song in Spain," Ben said. "You know—'Old soldiers never die, they simply fade away.' "

"We had it in 1917, too," said Sam Tabatchnik, "and I've got a hunch that the Roman legions in Gaul had an equivalent."

"I've got to go," said Ben, "I'm late to a date."

"Do I know the poor girl?"

"Sure," said Ben. "Sue Menken."

"Well, be nice to her. She's the sparkplug of your defense committee."

"I'm trying to persuade *her* to be nice to *me*," said Ben.

12

September—October, 1939

The night Lang took the train to Washington, Ben and Ellen turned up at the Booth Theater. The old doorman referred them to the stage manager, who told them Mr. Lang was not there and had been called out of town. He didn't know when he'd be back.

This struck Ben as strange, so he called Zav's number and got no answer. Perhaps Anne was ill, perhaps anything. Anyhow, they put it out of mind and he did not see Zav for several weeks.

And the play "Better to Die" almost died on its opening night in Philadelphia, for the day before the Nazis had invaded Poland and nobody was interested in anything but the war. September first was also the publication date of *Volunteer for Liberty* by Benjamin Blau, and with the start of the war the book market went into a spectacular slump.

Ben received in the mail a block of ten tickets for the night of September 13 with a scribbled note from Zav saying: *Bring some of the vets.* So he rounded up Busch and the rest of the executive board and with Ellen they sat in the orchestra on that Wednesday night. What they saw on the stage dismayed them and they were glad they didn't run into Zav in the theater that night.

Instead, they went to Childs and sat chewing the fat until after one o'clock. The play had received rave reviews and if Zav hadn't sent them tickets, they wouldn't have been able to see it for months. For a war drama of this type was exactly the sort of play the Broadway public was eager to see. It was romantic, it was nostalgic, it revived the painful memories of Spain without demanding anything of its audience but laughter and tears.

The vets were outraged by it. Ellen said she couldn't make a judgment but had found it moving. And that night at Childs the vets decided that they would have to issue a statement about it—perhaps in the form of an Open Letter. For after all, the hero was an American I. B. man and they were the representatives of those who had survived the Spanish war.

They met the next night at Ben's and came up with an *Open Letter to Francis X. Lang,* which they mimeographed and sent to all the newspapers. It said in part:

From its defeatist title—a perversion of La Pasionaria's stirring call to battle—to its hopeless final curtain, Francis X. Lang's play "Better to Die" is a violent distortion of the recent struggle in Spain.

It is difficult to understand how Mr. Lang, who played an honor-

able part in that heroic conflict as a correspondent for the wire services, could have so misrepresented the cause he so enthusiastically championed a few short months ago, and which he so ably portrayed in his book, "Madrid Will Be—."

We cannot recognize in Charles Wilton, the hero, the archetype of the American volunteer in Spain.

Nor is that conflict over, as the playwright seems to imply. And since it is not over, it cannot be said to have been lost. And Mr. Lang cuts the very heart out of the people he presumably loves and respects by so vulgar a presentation of the nature of their struggle...

As a matter of fact, no intelligent playgoer, seeing "Better to Die," would know what that war was all about. It most certainly was not a question of whether Charles Wilton would succeed in getting Consuelo Piñel into bed before she was accidentally killed in an air raid on Madrid!

Nor was the role of women in Spain such as is exemplified by Consuelo, a young woman who obviously resents the task to which she has been assigned by her government, and wants nothing more than to be the willing plaything of the "hero," a Lincoln Battalion man assigned to the rear echelons, where he is engaged in counter-espionage against his own comrades!...

We could make many criticisms of the minor characters in this play—the Republican colonel who behaves more like a fascist than a member of the Loyalist army; the "comic" Spanish chauffeur who is drunk all the time and complains bitterly over the shortage of good cognac; the sluttish hotel maid who is apparently an amateur prostitute, in conflict because she cannot bring herself to be a professional!

The essence of what Mr. Lang has said is this: The war should never have been fought in the first place because it was doomed to be lost; and, by extension, the struggle of any people for decency and freedom and peace is similarly doomed because they are not really bright enough to manage their own affairs.

The only newspaper to pick up and print the Open Letter was the *Daily Worker* although the drama critic of the *New York Times* did quote a paragraph or two in his Sunday piece and used them as a springboard for denunciation of those "who would like the artist to be a politician and a partisan in uniform."

What the obviously angry and sincere veterans fail to understand, the critic wrote, *is that Francis X. Lang is dealing here with one of the deathless themes of tragic literature: frustrated love.*

His treatment of it is dignified, even noble; and interestingly enough, in abandoning his usual unrhymed verse for simple prose, he has come closer to living, polyphonic poetry than he ever has before. The veterans saw the war in Spain over the sights of their

rifles. The poet sees it in a larger and truer dimension. "Better to Die" is a must for those who like to see the base materials of life transmuted into the pure gold of fine art.

The *Worker* ran the Open Letter on a Monday, one day after the Red Army had moved west to meet the Nazi *Wehrmacht* that was crushing Poland and had laid siege to Warsaw. And the same day Ben and Ellen received a telegram from Lang reading: PLEASE COME MY HOUSE TONIGHT. MOST IMPORTANT. DINNER AT SEVEN.

"Didn't think you were coming," Zav said, rising from table. He was slightly lit but in full command of himself. He took Ellen by both hands, gazed intently into her dark eyes and said, *"Bien, bien."* He kissed her on the mouth. Then he looked at Ben and said, "I congratulate you both."

Anne was pleased to see Ben and was gracious to Ellen and asked if she would like to attend a concert with her later that evening at the Juilliard school.

Ellen thought this strange but glanced at Ben and from the expression on his face she realized that obviously there was something Zav wanted to talk to Ben about that he didn't want the women to hear. Oh, well, she thought, we live and learn. She turned to Anne and accepted the invitation.

Then the dinner resumed with some discussion of the events of the last twenty-four hours. Lang kept shaking his head, saying the public would never understand what the Soviets were doing. As a matter of fact, to Lang himself it looked pretty much as though Hitler and Stalin had made a deal to carve up Poland.

Ben said that was ridiculous and Anne said, "No political arguments at dinner, boys. My father said it turned your food to poison." They all laughed. "You can argue after we're gone," she said.

"To hell with it," said Zav. "Here's metal more attractive," and he turned to Ben. "I subscribe to the *Daily Worker,* as you might have guessed."

"Oh-oh," said Ellen. "They're off!"

"Damned right," said Zav, lifting a glass of wine and offering Ellen a silent toast. "I'm not half as offended that the vets don't like my play as I am that they issued that blast without consulting me."

"Consulting?" said Ben and Zav said, "Well, that's not exactly the right word. But you might have come to see me and talked it over."

"We thought of it," said Ben, "but we decided that whether we did or not, we had to write that letter. It was a policy matter, decided by the executive."

"Frank was terribly hurt," said Anne.

"I'm sorry," said Ben. "It wasn't written to hurt him. It was written because we consider ourselves responsible people, and we're concerned with the picture the play presents of a struggle in which we were intimately involved, and a country where we left almost two thousand of our comrades."

"Granted," said Lang. "You're all wet about the play, of course. But it's your privilege to hate it. It's a free country."

"Why don't you answer us?"

"I've never answered a critic in my life," Zav laughed. "Who talks back to Brooks Atkinson or George Jean Nathan? Beneath my dignity."

"Why don't I bring Busch and some of the other guys over, who helped draft the letter—"

"Aha!" said Zav. "That *was* a slip! I thought I detected your fine Italian hand!"

"There were four drafts," said Ben. "And I didn't write the first one."

"Well," said Zav, "the only cash customers I'll lose are the *Daily Worker* readers, so what?"

Ben was so shocked by this remark that he was silent. Anne filled in the gap by saying, "Of course, Frank, I think the vets made one or two points that you ought to consider seriously. I'm not too satisfied with the treatment of the girl, myself."

And *that,* thought Lang, has at least two meanings, if not three or four. He realized that when he had had the DT's in Le Havre, he had raved about Dolores. He had therefore made a full and frank confession to Anne when he was well again and out of the American Hospital in Paris. (She *said* she had forgiven him.)

"You'd better get going, Annie, if you girls are going to the concert," he smiled.

"We'll be back by ten-thirty," Anne said from the foot of the stairs, "and I'd like to talk to Ben myself."

"I'll be here," said Ben, thinking, what a crude thing to do—dismiss the girls like this. I'll have to eat him out for it.

"I'm sorry to see you drinking again," Ben said and Lang said, " 'Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake.' That's from the New Testament, of course, which the Jews don't recognize."

"I read it religiously," said Ben with a smile.

"Don't be stuffy," said Lang. "That was a stuffy remark. Also that crack about—how did you put it, 'the picture the play presents of a struggle in which we were intimately involved blah blah'—sounded like Neville Chamberlain with his mouth full of bubble and squeak."

"Maybe it was blah to you, Zav. It wasn't to us."

"You're doing it again." He put down his glass, rubbed his hands and said, "The real reason I asked you over tonight has nothing to do with the play at all."

"Before you start," said Ben, "I was shocked by what you said about losing no customers except the *Daily* readers. That was a hell of a statement coming from a Communist."

"*Hermano mio,* you've hit it smack on the head. I asked you here tonight to serve as a courier."

"A courier?"

"Yeah, I want you to go to Twelfth Street and tell 'm I've resigned. Go to the Politburo itself."

Ben felt cold. "How do you know I'm a party member?"

"Who're you kidding?"

"I have no connection with the bureau."

Lang waved a hand. "So use whatever channels you use and inform them I've resigned."

"I don't understand," said Ben and Lang's mind said, You can scarcely blame him. Neither can you explain it. Nor can you tell him about the talk with the Skipper.

"Ben," he said, "the Pact finished me."

"How come?"

"The Pact and the invasion of Poland by the Red Army."

"One thing at a time," said Ben. "Unless I'm completely *loco,* I heard you explain the Pact on the radio the night it was signed."

"You did. I did."

"You were a hundred percent right. As a matter of fact, you helped to clarify my own thinking."

"I was. I don't need the *Daily Worker* or a section rep to give me the line. I'm an intuitive bird. I told you that."

"Then what the hell goes on?" said Ben. "If you understood it then—and don't give me that crap about a line—nobody gives *me* a line, either. I use my own head."

"I don't follow you."

"I said, if you understood it then why don't you understand it now?"

"That was before I saw the newsreel."

"Newsreel? What newsreel?"

"Ribbentrop arriving in Moscow," said Lang, tipping the cognac bottle. "The swastika flying over the Moscow airport."

Ben laughed.

Lang carefully put the snifter down and rose to his feet. "You laugh! I never hoped to *live* to see the day Communists shook hands with Ribbentrop! It was a filthy betrayal of everything they claim to stand for!"

"You sound like Wilhelmina Patton."

"She was *right!* And *you* don't belong in an organization like that, either. You're an honest man."

"She's a fascist bitch and you know it!"

"Now, now, Ben. Sticks and stones. Don't pin labels on people. It's too easy. Willie's no fascist. I've known her for twenty years. Any more than I am myself."

"Then what the hell kind of a Communist are you?" said Ben, also getting to his feet. "A *carrot* Communist?"

"What's that?"

"Red outside. White inside."

"Touché!" said Lang. "Could be.. But if it took a *flojo* character like me to clarify your thinking, what kind of a thinker are *you?"*

"That's argument *ad hominem,"* said Ben. "You were right then, and everything you said's been substantiated since. The fact that you're wrong now doesn't invalidate what you said on the radio. Relax."

"I'll be God damned if I will and I'll be God damned if you can explain it. You're going to have to resign yourself. You've been played for a sucker, with all the rest of the comrades."

"It can be explained if you're interested in an explanation."

"I'm *not!"*

"Then why should I bother?"

"Go ahead, go ahead," said Lang, sitting and taking up the snifter. "I'm listening."

"With all the brandy you've shipped since dinner, I doubt if you can hear a word I say."

"I hear. I hear. Talk. *Tell* me. I'm a dope, like all the other dopes who're dropping out of the party like flies."

He was right, Ben knew. In the month since the Pact was signed there had been a considerable turn-over. "The Soviet Union doesn't operate on moral principles alone," he said. "It's a real, live country, run by intelligent and realistic people."

"Realistic my ass-hole. That's another word I don't like."

"That's what I said. It lives in a world that's predominantly capitalist, yes?"

"Yes."

"Therefore it has normal relationships with capitalist states. It has pacts and agreements; non-aggression pacts . . ."

"What about the invasion of Poland?"

"One thing at a time. It has non-aggression pacts with more than a dozen nations right now." Lang was tapping his foot, his head tilted to one side, observing the ceiling with an expression of infinite patience on his face. (It reminded Ben of the way Ellen had behaved the day they'd had the argument.) "You're not listening," he said.

"I'm listening. And I'm not ten years old."

"You explained, yourself, that the mission sent to Moscow by the British and the French wasn't empowered to sign a contract for the purchase of fountain pens. You explained yourself that if you were faced with a sell-out by your friends, you'd make peace with your enemies—if you can't lick 'em single-handed."

"I'm all ears," said Lang, tapping his foot.

"Part of that agreement that never got signed," said Ben, "was an offer by the Soviets to defend Poland . . ."

"Some defense—an invasion!"

"The Poles wouldn't agree to it," said Ben. "They have a fascist government, too, or have you forgetten so soon? And has the Red Army bombed the civilian population of Poland? It hasn't! Has it ravaged the countryside? It has not. Has . . ."

"Then what the hell is it doing?"

"It's moved the Soviet boundaries to the West for the time being. It's put several hundred more miles between the Soviet peoples and the Nazis, or do you think they should have waited till the panzers got to the borders?"

"I don't know what to think," said Lang, rubbing his face with one hand, "except that I don't give a damn about what you're saying. Include me out, as somebody or other said once. We're going to get into this. . ." He stopped and put his hand over his mouth, yawned to cover the gesture and was silent.

(How could he tell Ben what had taken him to Washington? How could he tell him what the Skipper had said? How could he reveal the promise that had been made to him—that if the United States got into this fight he, Lang, would stand a good chance to be the official U.S. spokesman and therefore he couldn't be shooting his face off on the radio, defending the Reds who were no friends of ours anyhow?)

Ben apparently didn't notice the self-interruption. He was too involved in his argument. "I'm sorry you joined the party in the first place, Zav," he said. "I never thought you knew what the hell you were doing."

"I thank you."

"Your heart's in the right place, but I'd bet you haven't cracked a book since you joined or made any effort to understand what goes on—except with that fine intuition of yours. Intuition's not enough! You've got to use your brains."

"*Got* no brains. Got no politics."

Ben laughed. "That's Elliman talking; it's not Francis Lang. Remember what he said on the radio? Remember that time near Tortosa when we met you two and Dolores, and Elliman said he hoped Joe Faber came out alive?"

"I remember," said Zav, sipping another brandy.

"By the way," said Ben. "That notebook you mailed—Joe's notebook. It never got to his girl friend in Philadelphia."

"I prob'ly didn' mail it," said Lang.

"That's too bad. Lose it?"

Lang didn't reply to the question. Instead he asked one. "How'd you like the full page review I gave you in the *Times*?"

"Fine," said Ben. "Too bad the book isn't selling."

Lang tried to focus his eyes on Ben and said, "Want you t' know I wrote that *after* I decided I was washed up with the party."

"What does that mean?"

"Greater love hath no man," said Lang.

"To get back to what we were talking about," said Ben. "I don't think . . ."

"Don' care *what* you think. Don' care what *any* of you think. You don' *think,* period. You take orders."

"Now, just a minute . . ."

"You c'n put that in Joe Stalin's pipe an' smoke it." His voice rose. "No god damn hack I c'n write rings aroun' 's gonna give orders t' *me!*" He was far gone in brandy. A thin line of saliva drooled from his lower lip.

Ben got up. He looked down at the man lying prostrate in the overstuffed chair and said, "You know what you are, Lang? You're a *maricón!*" (He immediately regretted the epithet.)

Lang waved one hand, then came awake for a moment. "I f'rgive you," he said. He made the Sign of the Cross. "I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father, an' of the Son, an' of the Holy Ghos'. Amen." He hiccoughed and held out one hand.

"I c'n unnerstand how a guy like you, hadda rough time, been through a war, c'n say a thing like that to an ol' colleague. Intuitive, tha's me. Colleague should unnerstand a colleague."

He rose from the chair with difficulty. "Goin' so soon? Annie'll be disappointed."

Ben walked to the closet where the maid had put his hat and raincoat. He couldn't trust himself to say anything. He knew he had to get out of there quickly or he might sock the man. How stupid, he thought. I'll have to wait outside for Ellen or go right to the Juilliard.

"Need any dollars?" said Lang. "Play's a smash."

Ben hustled into his coat, jammed on his hat. Lang was still talking. "You're a rev'lutionary, Ben. *Be* a rev'lutionary."

As Ben walked to the door Lang said, *"Ben!"* with such passion that Ben turned and looked at him. The man's face was a mask of torture and contrition.

"Go on bein' an example t' me, Ben," he said.

3. The Prison

"Those nations professing to fear our methods will soon be most closely imitating those methods."

MEIN KAMPF

1

May 1, 1948

The first day of May was clear; the air was alive and the Cessna 140 lifted off the Teterboro runway as though it were anxious to get into the air, and climbed like a homesick angel.

Peggy had refused to come for a flight. Peggy was a pain in the prostate. He was glad she hadn't come along. He liked to be alone in the ship. Much as he enjoyed the sense of responsibility when he was carrying a helpless passenger who couldn't get down without his (Lang's) skill, he enjoyed even more the sense of loneliness that flooded him and wrapped him when he took off alone.

He climbed steadily out across the Hudson and was over Manhattan in no time. The Cessna was a honey. She was a sweet, free-flying little bitch. He looked to starboard and could see the express highway; to port and followed the snaking length of Riverside Drive and the Henry Hudson Parkway. Visibility unlimited, ceiling unlimited—a rare thing for New York.

At twenty-five hundred feet over Manhattan, he leveled off and steered a course downtown. It took no time before he was over the Empire State Building (too low for safety, really), and he put his port wing down and started a steep turn, pretending the mast was a pylon and he was back in his student-pilot days practicing on-pylon and around-pylon turns. Good for your coordination.

The turn was a bit too tight and he was getting a little too much centrifugal force. He loosened up on it and the horizon didn't appear so vertical and his guts didn't feel so heavy.

Then he executed an enormous figure-eight, using the Empire State and the Chrysler buildings for pylons. It was a sloppy maneuver. He remembered his first instructor, a fat little man who looked nothing like a pilot, telling him back in 1935 that he really shouldn't fly. "You're afraid of altitude," the guy had said, speaking through the Gosport tube in the old Fleet biplane.

The hell I am, thought Lang. I'll show you, you bastard, and he eased back a trifle on the wheel, opened the throttle and sat back. Right rudder again against the torque. Watch that airliner, he said to himself, spotting the Constellation climbing out of La

Guardia and cutting straight for the island. He headed further south but held the little ship in perfect climbing turns, port and starboard, ninety degrees at a time.

The altimeter showed six thousand, seven, eight. He leveled off and looked down, startled as always by the perfectly stationary landing wheels. He could never figure out why the wheels shouldn't turn in the airstream.

Then he realized again that there was some truth in what the instructor had said. He was curiously more uncomfortable at eight thousand feet than he had been at twenty-five hundred with the city right below him. Ridiculous, he thought. Your gliding angle is a good five to one, and from here you could find a place to sit down if you had to.

Nearer my God to Thee. The phrase popped into his mind and so he began to sing it out loud, trying to drown out the engine. He didn't succeed. He sang, *Off we go ... into the wild-blue-yonder, climbing high into the sun ...* God damned Air Force, turned me down when I applied. They didn't say it, but what they meant was—too much alcohol in the bloodstream. Too much air in the airstream. Too much too much.

Over the Battery he watched the tiny ships coming up the Narrows or pulling out down the Hudson and the East Rivers. *O! Liberty! Liberty! how many crimes are committed in thy name!* he thought. Who said that? *Give me liberty or give me death.* Of course, Madame Roland, when they trekked her through the streets of Paris in a tumbril. (Now they'll be trekking Blau. But no tumbril. No guillotine. No old crones knitting, knit one, purl one, as the head drops in the basket.)

The lean face of Father, no, Monsignor (excuse it) Francis X. Lynch suddenly stared at him from the altimeter. "I'll pray for you," he had said. Sweet of you, Father. Thank you, Father. (Father, I have sinned.)

It was in Washington, D. C. in 1942 after he had been turned down by the Air Force as a flying officer and was offered a commission in Army public relations and was wearing the uniform that he ran into Father Lynch. They had sat in a hotel room—which was it? the Mayflower of course—and played poker one night, all night long. I was plastered.

"I've read your book, Major Lang," the *padre* said and smiled.

"Which one?"

"Madrid Will Be—. And I saw your play, too—*Better to Die."*

"Did you?" said Zav, not particularly interested.

"I enjoyed them both," the uniformed priest had said (an Air Force captain, no less), and Lang had pricked up his ears.

"Thank you," he said politely.

"You were wrong of course," the priest said.

"About what?"

"About Spain," Lynch said, looking carefully at the cards Lang had dealt him.

Zav was tight enough and far enough from the Church to be a trifle nasty. "Were you *there?*" he asked.

"Of course not," the *padre* said, and looked at him with those astonishing black eyes. "Please don't misunderstand me. Nobody could read your book or see your play without realizing that you're an honest man and believe what you wrote."

"Thank you, captain," Lang said, and almost added, "For nothing." Then he did say, "How was I wrong?"

"You were misled," said Lynch, displaying three of a kind and losing the pot. "I can *never* draw a pair," he said with chagrin.

Lang was feeling belligerent. "I was misled?" he said. "By whom? The Comintern?"

The priest smiled at him. "No." he said. "By your good Christian heart."

I'll spike the crummy bastard, Lang thought. I'll cut him down to size. With deceptive humility he said, "Tell me something, Father. Franco said the war was fought to save Catholicism—a war between the Church and anti-Christ."

"That's *true.*"

"Then tell me—I saw many dead on the battlefields of Spain, many dead Moors, Mohammedans, mind you, members of the Spanish Foreign Legion—they wore the Sacred Heart of Jesus on their tunics."

Lynch smiled with forbearance. "I don't believe you," he said.

Lang almost exploded. "You just said you thought I was an honest man. Why should I lie about such a thing? I'm not a ghoul or I could have brought you a bushel basket full of them. I could have ripped them off the uniforms of the dead!"

"I'll pray for you," Lynch smiled and dealt the cards.

. . . and I detest all my sins because of Thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all-good and deserving of all my love . . .

Lang cleared himself, making a ninety-degree turn in either direction and looking sharply below. He knew he was going to do a spin now, at least a three-turn spin, maybe a four, and he wasn't wearing a parachute. Why are you doing this? he thought. And he answered himself. What are you worried about? You don't need a 'chute. A spin puts no more strain on the aircraft than a

steep turn, maybe even less. A spin isn't even considered an aerobatic maneuver. (That was no answer.)

He pulled the nose up and drew the throttle gently back till the engine was almost idling. He pulled on the carburetor heat. It was astonishing how the Cessna could hang by her nose, but the ailerons were mushy, and he had to walk the rudder pedals neatly and swiftly to hold the wings level.

Then he closed the throttle all the way, pressed full right rudder and pulled the wheel into his lap. The craft hung a moment, then fell off on the right wing and began to spin. He could see the Aquarium over the nose, then it was gone and he could see Governor's Island. Then he was spinning free and winding up rapidly.

He eased the wheel forward—too far forward—applied full opposite rudder till the spin stopped and started back on the wheel. The ship was in an almost vertical dive, and the air was screaming over the wings. He nervously shoved the wheel forward again and started it slowly back. She wasn't recovering as rapidly as he would have liked. His throat was tight. Inform on Blau, will you! he thought. Lie and blaspheme! May Day. It was May Day! Amazing that the international distress signal for aircraft was *May Day!* (*M'aider*—help me!—really, but prounounced the same.) O! irony of fate! *I firmly resolve, with the help of Thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasions of sin!*

The ship began to respond but the airstream was howling over the wings and he glanced nervously out and thought he saw a slight flutter at the wing tips. No! he thought. *No!* It could look like an accident. You *could* do it some time, and it *would* look like an accident and you wouldn't have to testify or bear false witness against thy neighbor.

The Cessna slowly came out of the dive, and Lang opened the throttle and climbed at a safe angle. Enough is too much, he thought. But why should I perform an Act of Contrition? What the hell have I done anyhow? I will *not* lie in court. I will tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help me.

Lynch was closer to the truth through faith than Lang was close to the truth through the sight of his mortal eyes. Venial eyes? Mortal, sinful eyes? Mine eyes have seen the glory. What if the Mohammedan Moors did wear the Sacred Heart of Jesus on their tunics, *Maria de los Dolores?* Did that invalidate the truth? *There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

Lang steered a diagonal course across the Hudson toward Teterboro, crabbing unconsciously against the wind. He knew the area by heart. He didn't need a map.

Why not do a one-eighty and head out to sea? Lindy. Lone Eagle. How far would you get? Three hours gas. You would get to the Point of No Return. Do you *want* to get to the Point of No Return? Yes and no. You would like to get into a situation where it would be easier to die than not to die but you don't want to do it consciously. She said it, didn't she, Annie the pie-face? "You will," she said, "whether you do or not. You're out to kill yourself one way or another."

"Balls!" he said aloud. *Cojones* and *me cago en los veinte cuatro cojones de los Doce Discipulos!* No! (Those are punished in hell who die in mortal sin . . .) *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

Who is my neighbor? Blau?

He started to let down after he crossed the New Jersey shore. "You're afraid of altitude, Lang," the flight instructor had said. "I'll pray for you." *Hail Mary, full of grace! the Lord is with Thee; blessed art thou among women . . .*

Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Lang entered the pattern at one thousand feet and looked for the wind-sock. It was the same as it was when he took off. There was a movie he saw once called "Only Angels Have Wings." *Angels are created spirits,* said the Catechism, *without bodies, having understanding and free will.* There are good angels and bad angels. Some temptations come from the bad angels.

Who is my bad angel? Lang wondered as he closed the throttle on the base leg and started his turn for final approach. Blau?

2

March 3, 1940

The atmosphere, the very feeling in the air must have been something like this in 1919 during the Palmer Raids, Ben thought as he and Ellen rode the subway uptown to Leo's house that Sunday afternoon. They had been invited for an early dinner. Mama would not be there, Belle said. She was staying with sister Stella and her husband Phil. She migrated back and forth between the two families.

Ever since the Finnish war started there had been tension in the air. You felt it everywhere you went. You met it in the most

unlikely places. You met it in your own home, Ben thought, glancing at Ellen sitting beside him.

She wasn't looking at anything in particular. She was staring at the advertising cards across the aisle, but that was merely a pretense for not talking to him. She was still sore. OK, he thought, let her work it out. But he had had a hard time explaining it, even to Ellen, and if you couldn't explain it to your own wife, you couldn't explain it to anyone. It was the Pact all over again, only worse.

Explain what? Ben thought: the Finnish war or the other business a week before? The hysteria abroad in the land had been sedulously manufactured. Nobody who understood what made the wheels go round could doubt it. But that didn't make the poison less virulent. And the odd thing about it was that so few people, including otherwise class-conscious workers, were putting two and two together.

Ellen glanced at him then and he smiled. She smiled back at him and he took her hand and squeezed it.

"Have you forgiven me, mama?" he said.

Ellen sighed. "There was never anything to forgive," she said. "You know that."

"In that case, I'm forgiven."

She laughed and, still holding his hand, she resumed her inspection of the advertisements. It had been a silly business, all right, Ben thought, but it had also been symptomatic of the times.

In the year they had been married they'd been having an increasingly difficult time making ends meet. And the fact that people couldn't see any connection between the alleged attack on Finland and the fact that even though Britain and France had declared war on Germany right after Hitler went into Poland, there didn't seem to be any fighting on the Western Front—both facts, both directly and indirectly, had made their situation more difficult.

The Reds and anyone considered an apologist for them had become extremely unpopular. Browder had been sentenced for "passport fraud" and was on appeal. The newspapers and radio commentators were foaming at the mouth. Mayor La Guardia had even reactivated a long dormant "Red" squad. The demand for speakers from the *New Masses* or *Daily Worker* panels had dropped off. Progressives everywhere were going into the woodwork.

So there had been weeks when Ben and Ellen and the baby had been dependent—actually—on the twenty dollars Jack Gross brought for little Ellen's support every Sunday. Then, after he had gone into business for himself as a certified public accountant

and employed other CPA's, he had raised the allowance to thirty dollars.

Some weeks, between articles for the *Masses* and the *Daily* and other publications, classes at the Workers School and lectures here and there, Ben had earned as much as sixty dollars. Then, in the next two weeks, he had made fifteen. And he was both humiliated by the situation and defensive at the same time.

What we predicted came to pass, Ben thought. We said that if Spain fell, there would be a second world war. It began within six months after the betrayal of Madrid. And then, when the Red Army occupied Poland up to the Curzon Line and the Finnish business started last November, suddenly the Nazis (whom everybody hated) faded into the background—when they weren't playing soccer with the French *poilus* in the Maginot Line—and the Soviet Union became the enemy!

The newsreels were full of alleged Russian atrocities against the Finns. The war itself was portrayed as a totally unprincipled example of Soviet aggression; and when the Red Army wasn't labeled an overwhelming mob of sadists, it was called an incompetent horde of faceless Oriental peasants driven up to the Mannerheim Line at the point of machine-guns, where the gallant little Finns annihilated them.

Ben turned to Ellen and said, "It will never happen again."

She smiled at him. "Forget it, darling," she said, but the smile, he felt, didn't really mean anything, and he actually had no answer to her unspoken question: when are you going to get a job that will pay a steady wage? Astonishing how so perfect a relationship could be strained and warped by the pressure of politics and economics. Or was it astonishing? Remember the Williamsons?

The week before, when there was no food in the apartment that Jack Gross' thirty dollar allowance had not bought, Ben and Ellen had had a terrible quarrel, and he had walked out and slammed the door.

He found himself in a waterfront bar on Sands Street drinking whiskey, which he didn't like. A chippie perched on the next stool and said, "Lonesome, honey?"

Ben looked at her. She was so young, even under the face-paint. She couldn't have been more than sixteen at the most. And he was reminded of the *puta* he had picked up at the café on the Rambla de los Flores in Barcelona two years before.

"Who isn't lonesome, honey?" he replied.

"Don't your wife understand you?"

"She understands me only too well," said Ben. "That's why I'm sitting here all by my lonesome."

"What you need is a good time, honey," the girl said.

"It would only make me more lonesome, honey," said Ben, looking at his empty shot-glass, and the girl got the point. This one was geared wrong. No soap. She got up and moved down the bar nearer to the street.

Ben spent the six dollars he had in his pocket on whiskey and came home dead drunk. Ellen was waiting for him, and as he came in the door he pulled out his pants pockets to indicate that they were empty. He was almost incapable of speech.

"I pissed it all away," he mumbled and headed for the bedroom. The room tilted sideways and he threw himself on the bed and had to hang on to the edges of the mattress for fear of being thrown onto the floor. Vaguely, he felt Ellen cover him with a quilt, and he sank gratefully into unconsciousness.

They changed trains at Seventy-second Street and waited for the local, and Ben was still holding Ellen's hand. Neither of them had anything to say. It was better that way, Ben thought. Or was it? Both of them had a bad habit of not cutting loose and getting a grievance off their chest—except for that one explosion.

As they got off at Seventy-ninth Street and started to walk to the Drive, Ben suddenly said, "Did I ever tell you about the Williamsons?"

Ellen looked at him. "Who were they?"

"When I was on the Globe in 1935, I covered their story. The father couldn't find work. The whole family, with three kids, was on relief. Neighbors said they'd been the happiest family in the block."

"No," she said, "you didn't."

So he told her what they got from Home Relief: $7.25 a week for food, $3.25 for rent, 60 cents for coal, 40 cents for gas, 35 cents for electricity, 25 cents for clothing—$12.00 a week for five human beings.

"I was in the police shack when the call came," he said, "and rode out with the cop."

He told her in understated terms what they had found. The four battered heads. The one throat slashed from ear to ear. The note on the table: *TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: God forgive me what I do. I'm out of my mind and crazy. No work. No work. The kids crying from empty bellies; Mabel nagging me, nagging, if you were a man you'd find some way to feed your children, what are you a man or a mouse? I am a mouse.*

Ellen looked at him as they turned the corner onto the Drive and tears sprang to her eyes. "Why did you tell me that?" she said. Was he equating himself with the suicide father of that murdered

family? Was he trying to shame her for having let him know she wasn't satisfied to "drift," as she had put it during the quarrel?

"Christ!" he said now, stopping on the corner and holding her arm. "I didn't have any ulterior motive. It just came to mind, that's all."

"Things come to people's minds for good reasons."

"Baloney," said Ben, knowing she was right. "The point is, I wanted to say I learned more from the Williamsons than I learned from any book I ever read. They were more responsible for making me what I am than the rough time I had myself after I lost my job on the Globe. After all, I was a single guy. I had no dependents."

And now you have, he thought, and what does she want you to *do?* They resumed walking toward Leo's house and Ben thought, Every time I open my big yap I seem to put my foot in it. But the Williamsons were the people Anatole France was thinking about when he wrote: *The law in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.* It was the Williamsons Marx had in mind when he wrote: *The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.*

As they rode up in the automatic elevator Ben kissed Ellen and said, "I'll never give you any reason to be ashamed of me, darling," and she returned his kiss and said, "I could never be ashamed of you. I'm too proud of you, you idiot."

Leo had been proud of him too, once, that day six months before when *Volunteer for Liberty* had appeared and Ben gave him a copy. The look on his face when he held the book in his hands—Ben had seen the same expression when Leo won the accident case against the giant corporation, and a crippled young worker received fifty thousand dollars to compensate him for being reduced—for life—to the mental age of a ten-year-old. (A heavy casting had slipped from a traveling crane and struck his head a glancing blow.)

"Go fight City Hall," Ben said aloud as they rang the bell, and Ellen looked at him and laughed. He noticed that the *mezzuzah* was no longer on the door jamb as Belle opened the door.

Ben got the odd impression that she wasn't pleased to see him—she smiled at Ellen and kissed her—and wondered why. The children, Danny and Sarah, had dinner in their room and did not appear again, and Leo was standing in the middle of the living room floor when they came in.

"Welcome," said Leo, chewing on an unlighted cigar. He took the cigar out of his mouth and kissed Ellen. "We've asked you up tonight to say goodbye."

"Goodbye?" said Ellen. "Where are you going?"

Leo sighed. "To Manila."

"The Philippines?" said Ben.

Leo nodded, took out Papa's cigar cutter and snipped the end off his Corona. "I've made an arrangement with Pevner about the practice. I'm taking a couple years off. Tired."

"Well," said Ben, "that's good. But why Manila?"

Leo laughed as the two men sat down and Ellen went to the kitchen to see if Belle needed any help. "You'll have your own explanation for it," he said. "We've had friends in the Philippines for many years. Maybe you remember them, the Weinsteins? They're in women's underwear?" Ben shook his head, and Leo said, "No matter."

Then the girls called them to table and they went into the dining room. Ben glanced at Belle. She was cold, reserved, rarely smiled. He wanted to ask her what's the matter, but first he wanted to find out more about their plans.

"The Weinsteins found us a nice house." Leo fished in his pocket and brought out a snapshot. Ben looked at it and passed it on to Ellen. "The climate's good," Leo sighed. "I'm only forty but I feel fifty-five."

"How's the baby?" Belle said to Ellen.

"Wonderful," she said. "Almost three. A little lady."

"You're fortunate," Ben said to Leo. "Not many people can knock off for a couple years. But I don't follow you, really."

"I don't like the way the world's going."

"So?" said Ben. "Who likes it?"

"*You'd* say I'm running away, except you know as well as I do that you can't."

"Then why do it?"

"I knew it," said Belle. "I knew he'd say it!"

Ben looked at her and caught Ellen's eyes. She shook her head, but he realized now that Belle's reserve was really personal hostility. "What's wrong?" he said. "You've been looking daggers at me ever since we came in the door."

Leo's wife glanced at Ellen and said with astonishing passion, "What've you done with your life? A mess you've made of it! Mixed up with radicals and Communists. Do you read the papers?"

"Every day," said Ben. "Seven of them."

"Let it go, Belle," Leo said. "You promised me. I don't want to quarrel with Ben. I don't want you to, either."

"Why should we quarrel?" said Ben. "My screwy ideas are nothing new to either of you."

"Maybe your wife agrees with them?" said Belle, tossing the challenge to Ellen. Ellen smiled and said, "I do."

"Humph!" said Belle.

"I'm happy for you," Ben said, "if travel's what you want. But I don't see why you can't tour the states. It's a big country."

"See, he thinks we're running away!" said Belle.

"Sh!" said Leo. "We are, as a matter of fact. We are. It doesn't matter." He turned to Ben. "Eat your food," he said.

"I'm eating," said Ben.

"Surely they can travel where they want to, Ben," said Ellen and he nodded his head but didn't answer. He had suddenly recalled the conversation they had had when he returned from Spain. "I used to be a socialist myself," Leo had said. What was up? Was he worried about the red scare?

"On this night I want no quarrels with my brother," said Leo. He cut his steak, but it was obvious he had no appetite. He looked at Ellen.

"You should excuse it, Ellen," he said, "but Belle doesn't approve of Ben. We might as well face it. Neither do I, Ben. I think you're wasting your life."

"I thank you," Ellen said with a smile, and Belle said, "It's *you* I'm thinking about, you and the baby."

"We're doing fine," said Ellen.

"I thought we weren't going to argue," said Ben.

"We're not," said Leo. "But there's no point in parting without an understanding. We've spoken of this before. If Papa were alive . . ."

"What the hell have I *done?*" said Ben, his voice rising in sudden annoyance, and Belle snapped, "Don't shout at my Leo, please."

Ellen said, "Look folks, I don't know what this's all about. Maybe we should go out and come in again."

Leo turned to Ellen and nodding toward her husband said, "He's the great explainer." He turned to Ben and said, "But tonight I don't want you to explain about the alliance your friends made with the Nazis, who're killing our people, or the invasion of Poland or the war with Finland. I want a peaceful meal."

"Then why bring it up?" Ben laughed. "I have no desire to explain any of them if you don't understand them."

"Ben, please," said Ellen, but Belle cried, "Only *you* understand. Only you understand *everything*. Everything backwards you understand. Everybody's out of step but *you!*"

"Sh!" Leo said to his wife; then, to Ben, "Oh, I understand all right. I understand fully," he said with heat. He put his fork

down. "And I don't approve no matter what you say, and I will not approve of them and I don't like my brother mixed up with people who approve of them . . ." he glanced at Ellen and added, "and I don't think she approves either, no matter what she says."

"Then let's drop it," said Ben. "Or maybe we should go?"

"So go!" said Belle. "*Alehvai.* Ellen should stay."

"Well, really!" said Ellen, and Leo said, "Sh!" to his wife "Please."

He turned to Ben, automatically assuming his judicious, courtroom manner. "So long as I could believe the Soviet Union was for the Jews, I was sympathetic."

"You have evidence it's not?"

"Please," said Ellen, turning to them all, "if there's going to be a quarrel, I'll go. It's *bad* of you. Everybody has a right to his opinions."

They were all silent, eating for a few moments. Then Leo said quietly, "I didn't mean that. *You* know what I meant. They don't approve of the Nazis. They make friends with Hitler. They don't approve of war. They make war on Poland and Finland. It's the same thing."

"What was Finland doing with twenty-three airports built by the Nazis that could handle ten times as many planes as they had?"

"No explanations, please," said Leo.

"I don't like my brother to advance an argument and refuse to listen to an answer," said Ben. "I'd like a few explanations myself, please. I'd like to know what the Finns were doing with fixed seige-guns twenty miles from Leningrad. Were the Russians threatening them? I'd like to know what all this poor little Finland business is, that the papers are weeping such crocodile tears . . ."

"Just a minute," said Leo.

"Ben," said Ellen. "Drop it, will you?"

"I'd like to know how come Chamberlain sent planes, shells, bombs and everything to Mannerheim when England was supposed to be fighting the Nazis in the West and wasn't—and *still* isn't; explain, please."

"*You're* the great explainer," Belle said bitterly.

"Then I'll explain!"

"No!" she said, putting her hands over her ears. "Better you should make a living for your wife and child instead of letting her ex-husband . . ."

"Belle!" said Ellen. "Don't talk about things you don't know anything about!"

Ben got up from the table. "I don't know what you asked us

here for? to insult us? We've never agreed politically, but that never made any difference to *me* . . ."

"Sit down," said Leo.

"He's a bum!" said Belle. "Let him go. A no-good Communist bum! Siding with our enemies against our own country."

"I won't *stand* for this," said Ellen, starting to cry. She got up from the table and left the room. Belle started to follow her but sat down immediately. Ben looked at his brother who was sitting miserably holding his fork with a piece of steak stuck on it.

"Do you agree?" he said. Leo said nothing. "Do you?"

Leo put down the fork, looked up, then got up from his chair. "You and I are men," he said. "We can talk like men." He took Ben's arm, started to walk him toward the livingroom. He turned and said excuse me to his wife.

"You're afraid to talk in front of me? *Schlemiel!*" she said and got up. "I'll go to Ellen."

When they were in the livingroom, Leo said, "Ben, I don't like calling people names. I've told you many times you should make something of yourself. You have a good head."

"I'm working for a living."

"You're writing? Making speeches? That's a living?"

"You were pleased about the book."

"Did the book sell? Did you write one that *could?*"

"That's important to you, isn't it?"

"Isn't it important to *you*? I know. You say yes, I say no. We'll never agree. By Belle's definition you're a bum. By me you're a misguided man. You made your bed. It shouldn't be any skin off my back. I respect you, Ben, but you can't see the forest for the trees."

"*You* see it," said Ben. "What is it? What do *you* live by—the fat fees insurance companies and corporations toss you for screwing honest people out of their money?"

"For shame!" said Leo. "I represent companies, yes. But I take lots of free work for people who can't afford. Only two years ago I represented the Workers' Alliance, while you were in Spain."

"You don't like the way the world's going? What're you going to do about it in Manila?"

"I'm no politician."

"I'm not a politician, either. I'm a citizen. I stand up on my hind legs and speak my piece. *You* don't like it either, so what do *you* do? Are you afraid the Dies Committee will find out you were a socialist once?"

"So," said Leo, angrily. "*Schrei gevalt!* See where it gets you. *Fight* City Hall. Make a commotion. A lump on the head it will

get you. Prison it will get you! *Be* a hero. *Be* a radical! But your own wife and child you can't support. I begin to think Belle's right."

"OK," said Ben coldly. "Then we understand each other."

"I don't understand *you,* Ben. You have a kind heart. You love people."

"I'm a bum. I don't mean a thing I say or do. I *use* people for my own sinister purposes, like the papers say. I want *power!*"

"I didn't mean it."

"You said it."

"I'm like Papa. I say many things. I *love* you. You're my flesh and blood, Ben. If you ever need help . . ."

Ben took Leo by both arms and said, "Lee, we're not the first brothers who've been separated from each other like this. The world's full of them. In our Civil War, in the October Revolution, in Spain, in every conflict since the world began."

"I *want* to be on your side," said Leo. "But I can't. I'm af—" He checked himself and said indignantly, "Besides, I don't believe you're right!"

"Leo," said Ben, "you could never convince me that the way to get a decent world is to sit on your *tuches* and wait for it. I could never convince you that socialism . . ."

"So, I'm convinced," Leo said miserably.

"But you wouldn't lift a finger to help."

Leo frowned. "In such a world there'd be no place for me."

"Ridiculous," said Ben. "There's a place for everyone except the blood-suckers."

"You called me a blood-sucker."

"I didn't mean it either," Ben said with a smile. "I think I understand what's going on in the world. So do my comrades and there are millions of them, and they're neither fools nor devils with horns. You see it differently—you and millions of others. Somebody's right and somebody's wrong, or we're *all* wrong. Time will tell."

"I should live so long."

"It's happening right under your very nose," said Ben. "Out of the World War the Soviet Union was born. After this war, there will be *more* socialist countries, you'll see."

"There should *be* no wars."

"Amen," said Ben. "Brother, where you're going the majority of the people are in rags, half-starved, diseased. They live like dogs. *Look* at them, Leo. Ask yourself why this should be when the earth is rich and can provide for all. Ask yourself, and answer it."

"*Sholom aleichem,*" said Leo.

"To *you,* peace," said Ben. He kissed Leo's cheek and went to the bedroom where Belle was bending over Ellen, who was sitting on the bed looking at the wall.

"Come," said Ben, and Ellen rose as though she had been waiting for some stimulus to set her into motion. Belle left the room without saying a word.

They rode all the way to Fourteenth Street before either of them spoke. Then Ellen looked at Ben and smiled faintly.

"You didn't have much to say," he said. She shook her head. "You didn't even come to my defense."

"I don't know how to fight with people," Ellen said in a voice he could barely hear. "I never did."

"Maybe you agree with them."

She looked at him reproachfully and said, "How can you say such a thing?"

"You've said as much to me."

"I never said I disagreed. I said I didn't understand." She had joined the party, but she was like a bump on a log at meetings, contributing nothing to the discussion. If it's anybody's fault, Ben thought, it's mine. I haven't made an effort to draw her out—neither have the other comrades—to help her; to explain to her when she didn't understand. I've been impatient, intolerant, selfish and superior.

"Why don't you make an *effort* to understand?" he said angrily. One or two people looked at them, and Ellen shook her head and said, "Later, please."

He lapsed into silence and said nothing for the rest of the ride. Bad enough he should take a beating from his brother, from Belle, from the capitalist enemy and his god damned economic system, without his wife standing on the sidelines like a spectator and saying piteously I don't *understand.*

He remembered saying to the adolescent chippie in the Sands Street bar, "She understands me only too well." The hell she does, he thought as the train entered the tunnel under the river and the old sound, so different from the under-earth sound, was heard. His ears clicked and he swallowed.

3

May 14-*June* 15, 1948

The second week in May during pre-trial argument in United States of America v. Benjamin Blau, Sam Tabatchnik filed a motion to dismiss. The facts alleged in the indictment, he insisted, did not constitute an offense against the government.

Referring to the testimony of the defendant before the Un-American Activities Committee, Tabatchnik's motion before Judge Einhorn, who would try the case, argued that Blau's replies were given in good faith, that his obvious indignation was evidence of that good faith and negatived any intention on his part to conceal the truth.

"His immediate, angry reply to the question '. . . were you trained by Red Army men?', to which he answered, 'That's ridiculous!' and his prompt response to the next question, 'Your answer is no?' ('Of course.') are not the responses of a witness intent on deceiving his interrogators.

"Granted for the moment (which we do not grant) that Blau and the three thousand other volunteers who belonged to the Lincoln Battalion of the International Brigades were actually trained by Red Army men whom they never saw and were commanded in action by Red Army men they never met (a manifest absurdity), the defendant's replies could not possibly be construed as perjurious.

"The indictment, as a matter of fact, hangs upon a semantic interpretation of the phrase 'Red Army men,' which must fall of its own weight when the actual facts of history are adduced. Neither hysteria nor the passions of the marketplace can be permitted in an American court of justice to twist the meaning of words nor alter demonstrable facts. . ."

Ben's attorney also asked for a subpoena *duces tecum* that would bring into court the testimony of Francis X. Lang in two executive sessions of the Un-American Activities Committee on November 7 and December 8, 1947.

"The defense has reason to believe," this motion read, "and, in fact, does believe that the said testimony of the said Francis X. Lang was at least in part responsible for the indictment of the defendant. In the preparation of his case, the defendant therefore has a right to inspect this testimony."

Counsel for the Department of Justice, Phelps Billings, opposed both of Tabatchnik's motions. He said the language of the indict-

ment was plain enough, that no semantics (whatever that might mean) were involved in it and that the government was prepared to prove its contentions.

In respect to the motion to discover the testimony of Francis X. Lang, the government need not rely on it in proving its case against Blau. Neither did the defense require it to prepare its own case. For Blau knew very well what he was charged with. There was nothing obscure about the government allegations, and they should provide adequate information on which the defense could go to work.

Billings' manner in the courtroom, Tabatchnik noticed with amusement, was one of utter condescension. He seemed to think his case was entirely sewed up before it came to trial and that he could afford to commiserate with the defense attorney. Well, Sam thought, there are as many courtoom attitudes as there are bedside manners among physicians.

He was sorry, in a way, that they had decided not to ask Anne Lang for an affidavit that might have bolstered the motion for discovery, but while the former Mrs. Lang had been willing to supply it, Ben himself had argued against it.

"There's no reason," he had said, "for us to drag Anne's troubles into court along with mine. She has no actual proof that Zav's going to be a witness and your motion wouldn't be strengthened by a statement that she had a strong suspicion he was going to appear."

Clever of them, Tabatchnik thought, to have assigned a Jewish judge to the case. That way—so far as the public was concerned—they spiked any allegation of anti-Semitism. And Billings would be certain to admit a Jew or two to the jury, if they were the right sort of Jews. (There is no essential difference, Sam thought, between a rich Jew and a rich *goy*.)

On May 20 Bernard Byron's column appeared with the following juicy piece of information:

> *A well-known author and radio commentator has been squiring a luscious dish to all the night spots since late in February. They were at El Morocco last night, very lovey-dovey... February was the month the prominent scribe's wife left their swank apartment and the luscious dish remained—as secretary, it says here ... Political disagreement is said to be behind the separation ... The husband is rumored to be angeling the defense of a* Daily Worker *scribbler, due to be tried next month—for perjury ... Who said politics makes strange bedfellows? ...*

On Saturday Sam met with Ben's defense committee at his office on Wall Street. Anne was there, Sue Menken, Ted Barrow, secretary of the Lincoln Veterans, and Ben himself.

Sue handed the Lyons item to Anne when she came in, saying, "Remember me? I met you at your ex's house a little over a year ago."

Anne smiled and said, "Of course." She glanced at the clipping and said, "I saw this thing. At least he's got the date of the separation straight."

She turned to Sam and said, "I should have executed that affidavit we discussed."

"No," said Ben. "It wouldn't have done any good and would only have forced the government to put you on the stand. If Zav doesn't appear, that's so much gravy. If he does, we can cross-examine him without dragging you into it."

"What do you think, Sam?" Anne said.

"I agree with Ben. Except that I don't think Billings would call you in any event."

"Well," said Sue, "now that the cat's out of the bag, I hope Leonard Lyons will help us a little more by identifying the 'prominent scribe' and dishing some more dirt about him."

Anne looked at her. She was puzzled for a moment. Then she laughed and decided that she liked this girl. Ben obviously liked her, too, for he could hardly keep his eyes off her. And Anne began to remember the evening Sue had referred to. That was the night Wilhelmina Patton was there and the big argument took place and Frank had to be put to bed. She blushed, remembering what had happened before he passed out and Ben half-carried him upstairs.

Anne watched the play between these two and made up her mind about them. She turned to Sam and said, "I'm a poor hand at politics, but I think I know where I can get some more money for this committee."

"That's great," said Ben. "Otherwise counsel's going to have to put it on the cuff."

"Counsel has wide cuffs," said Sam, deadpan, popping his cuffs out of his coat sleeves. "But let's get down to business. We're going to need the widest publicity for this case. The *Daily,* of course, will play it big. The vets will do what they can. But I'd like to see it broadened out."

"You want I should make a united front with Leonard Lyons?" said Sue, flapping her eyelashes, and Ben took a playful swipe at her, missing by about three feet . . .

BLAU TO TRIAL TODAY the *Daily Worker* reported in a five column banner. The read-out said: *Daily Writer Pledges Vigorous Fight Against Frame-Up.*

NEW YORK, June 1—Ben Blau, staff-writer for the Daily Worker and veteran of both the Lincoln Brigade and World War II, was scheduled to go on trial in Federal court today on a framed charge of "perjury."

Judge Allan Einhorn will hear the case and Blau will be represented by Attorney Samuel Tabatchnik of this city.

The trial stems from Blau's appearance before the Un-American Committee on December 10 of last year, when the decorated World War II hero answered "No" to a loaded question propounded by the inquisitors.

The question was: "When you were in Spain, were you trained by Red Army men?"

Attorney Tabatchnik, in an interview with the Worker yesterday, said: "The case represents a crude frame-up. Blau told the truth in reply to the investigator's question, but the government is relying on the Cold War atmosphere to railroad this man to prison for five years and to intimidate the newspaper by which he is employed."

A reporter spotted Anne Lang seated in the courtroom next to Sue Menken and said, "Hello, Mrs. Lang. Gallard of the *Journal.* Do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"Of course not."

"Are you here as a spectator or a witness?"

"A spectator, of course."

The reporter looked at Sue as though he expected her to introduce herself or Anne to introduce her. Neither said anything, so he resumed.

"Is it true that you and Mr. Lang are separated?"

"It's true," said Anne and turned to Sue in an obvious attempt to give the reporter the brush-off. He did not take the hint.

"May I ask what your interest is in this case, Mrs. Lang?"

She turned and gave him an icy stare, realizing immediately that she was handling the whole thing rather badly. She had a feeling that even if she told the truth, the *Journal* would certainly not print it (unless it could be used to hurt Ben), but she decided to tell it anyhow. She felt Sue touch her thigh.

"I've been acquainted with Mr. Blau for many years," she said. "I'm naturally interested in what happens to him."

"Then you're on his side in this case?"

"He's presumed to be innocent, isn't he?" Sue said suddenly and the reporter looked at her.

"May I ask your name, please?"

"Katharine Hepburn," Sue said, batting her eyes and expanding her nostrils. "Go peddle your papers some place else."

The reporter looked at both women, tried a tentative grin, then dashed off to the telephone. Anne turned to Sue and said, "I made a mess of that, didn't I?"

"You shouldn't have answered," said Sue. "That bird is Hearst's Communist expert. I tried to warn you."

"Oh?" said Anne. "I didn't get it."

"Sure," said Sue. "He knows all about it. Used to be a Communist himself once. In fact, he worked on the *Daily*."

"What changed him?"

"Money."

Anne looked at the girl sitting next to her and said, "Ben's awfully fond of you, isn't he, Sue?"

"Is he?" Sue replied, and Anne smiled. "I'll tell you something much worse. I'm *nuts* about the guy."

"Then what's keeping you apart?"

"Me," said Sue. "I'm a personality problem."

The bailiff rapped on his desk, the judge entered and the spectators stood up. Einhorn was a man in his middle fifties whose hair was snow-white. He was a casting director's dream of what a judge should look like and he knew it.

When the preliminaries were over he called both attorneys to the bench and said, "I have considered Mr. Tabatchnik's two motions. I will deny the motion to dismiss. I have considered the legal question raised by defense counsel and find that it is without merit." (Tabatchnik reserved an exception to the ruling.)

The judge slid his glasses up to the bridge of his fine nose and glanced at the document before him. "On the motion praying for a subpoena *duces tecum*. I would ordinarily grant such a motion, despite the government's opposition. But the testimony counsel for the defense would like to discover—Mr. Lang's testimony—has been made available to me, and I am inclined to agree with the government's contention that in the interest of national security it should not be disclosed.

"We are living in dangerous times. Mr. Lang in his capacity of foreign correspondent with all that such a profession entails by way of access to confidential information in the possession of foreign governments—and our own government, for that matter—Mr. Lang, I say, has testified to matters which go to the national

safety. I will deny the motion, and if both sides are ready I think we may proceed to the selection of a jury."

It took till June 11—eight trial days—to select the jury, for from the very beginning it was obvious that Billings was intent on getting a particular kind of jury, and Tabatchnik had to use up all his challenges.

How was it possible, Sam wondered, in June of 1948 to find a jury in the city of New York that had *no* opinions about Communists or Communism and could honestly swear that it would decide the case on the evidence alone and resolutely refuse to be swayed by the political affiliations of a defendant who was alleged to have opinions and associations that bordered on the treasonable?

The jury finally consisted of an insurance broker, two housewives whose husbands were, respectively, a garage manager and an automobile agency owner, a Negro undertaker and a retired bank executive, the proprietor of a retail shoe store, an advertising writer (female), an AFL business agent, two elderly widows living on annuities, a high-school chemistry teacher (male) and a certified public accountant (female.)

Billings' opening statement delivered the following Monday was in startling contrast to the manner he had assumed in the pretrial arguments. He did not raise his voice, but he was sharp, incisive and deliberate. His eyes flashed as he set forth the points that the government would prove and his inflection of the words Communist and Communism carried the obvious implication that he was dealing with something that was not only treasonable but also obscene and degenerate.

Tabatchnik objected at several points, arguing that Billings was going far beyond the scope of an opening statement, which was expected to be neither hortatory nor argumentative, but Judge Einhorn overruled him.

Billings reminded the jury, using the judge's very words (spoken before the jury was empaneled) that the case went to the national security. He implied, without saying as much, that the government of the United States was at that very moment carefully scrutinizing the activities of the defendant's associates.

Ben, sitting next to Tabatchnik, wrote on a pad: *What's he mean?* and Sam replied, *Rumor grand jury sitting some time on CP,* then crumpled the paper and put it in his coat pocket. Ben looked around the courtroom during recess, expecting to see Francis Lang. He was disappointed, and the balance of the day was devoted to Sam's reply.

He opened by demanding a mistrial and a directed verdict of acquittal on the grounds that the government presentation had

been tendentious, inflammatory and designed to hopelessly prejudice the jury even before the introduction of the evidence. The motion was denied by Judge Einhorn, who said:

"I habitually permit counsel considerable leeway in the presentation of opening statements, Mr. Tabatchnik. If the evidence does not sustain the claims they make, the jury in our American system is the first to notice it."

He turned to the jury box. "As I have already told you, ladies and gentlemen, and I'm certain you do not need this additional admonition, unless they involve stipulated material, statements made by counsel at any time during the trial itself are not to be considered evidence. They tend, more often than not (he smiled) to be somewhat self-serving. You are the sole judge of the evidence, and the evidence must be sworn to by witnesses or presented in the form of documents or other physical forms. You alone will determine what credence to place in these documents or in the testimony of the witnesses. Proceed."

On Tuesday the fifteenth the first government witness was presented. He was the Committee's chief investigator and inquisitor, the man with the Southern Accent, and his sole function was to testify that the Committee held a public session on December 10, 1947, that Ben Blau was subpoenaed to appear; that he did so appear; that he gave certain testimony, which testimony was then read.

"Your witness," Billings said.

"No cross-examination," said Tabatchnik. "We will stipulate that the transcript of the defendant's testimony before the Committee is correct."

If I were on the jury, Ben thought as the Committee's investigator left the stand, I would convict me on the spot.

4

8 December 1941—15 March 1942

There was a cold wind blowing off the Atlantic and whistling through the canyons of lower Manhattan that Monday morning. Ben stood in line with the other men, a line that extended to the corner and around the corner, and like the others he had to wipe his streaming eyes, blow his nose, stamp his feet and clap his hands.

The men, most of them young but with a sprinkling of older

men, were impatient. They shouted, "Come *on,* get the lead out! The Japs ain't waiting!"

It took a good half-hour before Ben got into the building at 39 Whitehall Street and was meshed into the Army machine that was handling the volunteers. How young they are! he thought. He was thirty-one himself, and he had been a good four years older than most of the men in the Lincoln Battalion. Now he was almost ten years older than the majority of these kids . . .

"You're thirty-one!" Ellen said. "You're married. We have a child. You don't need *to enlist. They don't* need *you. There are millions of young kids!"*

They don't know what they're getting into, he thought. They have no concept of warfare. Nobody has any idea of war except those who have been through it, and they can't communicate. No writer has *ever* been able to communicate it either; not even Barbusse in *Le Feu* or Andreas Latzko in *Men in War* . . .

"You want to go to war!" she cried. "It's an escape for you! An escape from me and little Ellen and your failure to get a decent job. It's easier for you to go to war than stay with us and fight for your wife and child!"

Maybe the older men in the line, World War I vets. Like women who had given birth, they remembered and forgot. Surely these "retreads," as they so proudly called themselves, knew what it was all about, and these men he admired even more than the impatient youths on the line, anxious to get going.

He realized that he was almost pleased the war had come to America (is *that* what Ellen meant?) It was a perverse feeling, but he had been uncomfortable during 1939, 1940 and 1941 with the party's attitude toward the war. He had been embarrassed by the slogan: *The Yanks Aren't Coming!* and even more embarrassed when it was changed to *The Yanks Aren't Coming Too Late!* Some of the comrades said it was because he had no fundamental understanding of the real nature of imperialism, that he should have gone to school when he joined the party, done some intensive studying. Ben had disagreed . . .

"I disagree!" Ellen had practically shouted.

"I'm an anti-fascist, a Communist!" Ben replied, controlling his voice with difficulty. "That's why I joined the Brigade—because I couldn't stand by and watch what they were doing to Spain. Now the war has come to us. Do you think I'm going to stand by and watch them take us *over, too?"*

Certainly it had been true from the beginning that the war had a large imperialist content and Finland and the quiet on the Western Front were the proof of it. (The Finnish embassy in Madrid

had been the center of the Nazi Fifth Column in Spain.) And it was true that the big business rivals of Hitler were out to smash him and take over his empire for their own reasons (and the reasons were scarcely obscure).

It had all begun when the radio announced the attack yesterday. Ellen was sitting in the armchair. Ben was reading the Sunday paper. Jack Gross had come early to take little Ellen out for the day. Both of them looked up, their mouths open. Then Ellen burst into tears and said, "No! No! Now you'll enlist . . ." (and had suppressed the rest of the sentence). It had burst from her without any intention on her part to reveal what she had been thinking about for months . . .

But once the blitz on England had begun, once the phony war had ended and the invasion of Belgium, Holland and then France had begun, the war *had* assumed a different aspect. Even before the Soviet Union was invaded, Ben felt, the *peoples* of England and the western European countries were fighting an anti-fascist war.

While it was true that once a hundred and eighty million people who lived in a Socialist country were suddenly involved, the character of the war would *have* to change, it was still true that those who were dying under the Stukas were not fighting for the British Empire or the French and Dutch colonies. The Norwegians would settle accounts with Quisling. The people were fighting for their lives; and they were fighting for their countries, whatever their leaders hoped to get out of it.

"Have you learned nothing *in the party?" Ben had demanded angrily.*

"I've only learned that the party means more to you than we do," Ellen replied.

"That's nonsense!" Ben had shouted and she said, "Don't scream at me. You don't convince anyone by screaming." He moved toward her, but she moved away. "Don't touch *me!" she said. "Francis Lang had sense enough to get out of it. But not you. Oh, no! You love the whole world so much you can't love your own wife and child!"*

"How can you say *such a thing?" Ben said, outraged.*

"Because you won't even make a decent living—"

"Aha!" he said.

"Aha!" she mocked him. "Laugh it off. Let Jack support the baby. Imagine you're a great writer because you had a book published once. Rest on your laurels."

"Ellen," he said, deeply hurt, "when we met, and ever since, you've agreed with our ideas."

"I've come to hate *them!" she cried, tears streaming down her*

face. "All they do is separate you from me. Meetings, meetings, meetings all the time. Yak yak yak. You'd rather go to Brighton Beach to make a speech for ten dollars than get a decent job."

"Who'd hire me?" he shouted. "The Globe? The World-Telegram? *Henry Luce?"*

"So stop being *a writer!" she said. "Be something else. There's no law on the books says you've got to be a writer and starve to death."*

"Are you starving?"

Each man in the line got a round, green tag on a string, and a soldier said, "Hang it around your neck." They laughed and shoved and moved past the head of the stairs into a large room the soldier had pointed out. In this room, already littered with cigarette butts and empty cigarette packages, they sat on hard chairs and listened as a corporal spoke to them, Some men had brought their lunch in paper bags; others had brought suitcases and duffle-bags.

The corporal was glib, and Ben got the feeling that he had some theatrical experience. He timed his wisecracks cleverly and he posed as he spoke. He did a neat double take at certain questions fired at him and the questions were endless. They were waiting there till they could get to the next stage of their induction.

This was the way it had been in Albacete, Ben thought, remembering his first enlistment. (*Waiting, waiting, wait-ing, always fuckin' well wait-ing* . . .) And it was different. For the majority of the men who had come to Spain climbing the Pyrenees at night, bypassing the French patrols of the Non-Intervention Committee, were a breed never seen before on land or sea or in the air. Most of them were highly politicalized and knew precisely what they were doing. Practically none had any illusions about what went on in a war. Only a handful were actual adventurers.

And Ben had the feeling talking to these recruits and to the other yard birds when he got to Camp Dix that while there was a genuine hatred of Japan and Germany, very few had anything more to go on than the spontaneous rage provoked by the attack on Pearl Harbor. That was enough to start with, he felt, but somewhere along the line they would have to be told what it was all about.

Before the bus left for Dix, Ben called Ellen and told her he was going directly to the camp. "When the basic training's over, I'll get a furlough," he said. "But maybe you'd like to come down to where I am, when I find out where I'll be."

"Maybe," she said, her voice listless over the wire.

"What *is* this, Ellen?" he said.

"You're not really stupid, are you?" she said. "I thought I made it plain. I think you're making a big mistake."

"I don't."

"I know you don't," she said. "I suppose you must do what you think is right. You're the *man* in the family."

"How could I do anything else?"

"Don't worry about us, Ben," she said, and he felt the barb sink into his flesh. "We'll be all right."

"Write to me," he said.

"Of course," she said. "Take care of yourself, darling."

He called Ellen once a week from Camp Dix, but the conversations were entirely unsatisfactory. You can't get close to a person over the telephone.

Ben spent six weeks in Camp Dix, but it was not until the end of the fourth, that he realized something was up. He inquired but got no satisfactory answers. He thought about the problem and certain obvious answers occurred to him: G2 undoubtedly knew about his politics, and he had written, proudly, on the line next to *Military Experience*: 1937, 1938, Company 2, 58th Battalion, XV International Brigade, Spanish Republican Army: last rank held, *Teniente* (lieutenant, company commander).

He was therefore prepared to be treated with some suspicion, but he was not prepared for what happened on February 1, when he was shipped to Camp Wheeler, Georgia. He had noticed that there were an unusual number of MP's on the train and from another guy he had heard a rumor: that in this shipment there was a considerable group of men suspected of sympathy with the Nazis and the Italian fascists.

He made it a point once they had passed Washington to ask the name of every man who seemed willing to start a conversation, and he met a lot of men with names like Brunner, Holtzhoff, Impliazzo, Ferrucio, Muller, Anastasio and Ricci. And what they had to say about the war made it obvious that the rumor was accurate. I'll take this up the minute I get to camp, Ben decided. I'll be damned if I'll spend any time in an outfit like this.

He found himself barracked with the same men when he got to Wheeler and a lot more who looked and talked like them and had similar names. But here the vastness of the Army apparatus engulfed him and he realized that it would take weeks, if not months before he could get this misunderstanding straightened out.

Albacete and Tarazona were never like this, Ben thought as he walked the vast expanses of the base. The profusion of materiel—and materiel was a good word—was staggering. If we'd had this stuff in Spain! The endless areas, the crammed warehouses, the moun-

tains of food and equipment made him feel as though he were swimming in molasses.

This was a monstrous business enterprise. There were even complicated IBM machines in the finance department that processed records and paychecks by pushing buttons and spewed them out like confetti.

In the company areas there were rows of garbage cans individually marked: *Wet Garbage, Dry Garbage, Milk Bottles, Tin Cans, Egg Shells, Coffee Grounds, Pig Food.* Astonishing organization and efficiency in the administration of *things* (like any big business); on the other hand, a mindless process that took no account of the individual, his needs or aspirations except to make certain that he became a well-lubricated moving part in a vast and intricate mechanism and served the function of that part (like any corporation).

The first opportunity Ben got to state his case was to a public relations sergeant who interviewed him the second week he was in camp. This young man seemed sympathetic to his Spanish experience and even looked at him with something approaching awe. That the sentiment was genuine, Ben was reasonably sure, for the sergeant had sent for him. He had not applied to see the man.

"I was going through the files," Sergeant Holmes said, "and your record interested me. I read a lot about that war and my sympathies were always on the side of the Loyalists. It's not true, is it," said Holmes, "that all you guys were Communists?"

Watch it, Ben said to himself, this may be a provocation. You're not a party member any more. You're not an organized Communist because the party believes that continued affiliation is not consistent with Army enrollment and could conceivably lead to factionalism that would be harmful to the war effort.

"No," he answered. "It's not. But a lot were." (If this guy is a provocateur, he thought, he's pretty clumsy at it.)

Ben had a cordial conversation with Sergeant Holmes and expressed his surprise at finding himself in an outfit that had a lot of men suspcted of disloyalty. "I'm no fascist," he said.

"We have a lot of them," said Holmes. "And it wouldn't do any harm if you kept your eyes peeled. It might do you and the Army a lot of good, at that."

"Would you advise me to apply for a transfer out?"

"Not yet," said Holmes. "See what happens. And I'll pass the word along myself. You have to do things the Army way, you know." He smiled.

"Yeah," said Ben. "I've heard. There's the right way and there's the Army way."

"You catch on quick," said Holmes and he stood up, glanced around, then offered his hand.

Ben shook it quickly, said, "Thank you, sergeant," left the room.

For the next five weeks he was involved in basic training and not a day passed that he didn't have that odd sensation that everyone has experienced: I've been here before.

For here, again, as in Tarazona, he went through the close order drill, the open order drill, the physical exercises and the route-marches, the combat formations, night bivouacs, infiltration and dry-firing, the lectures on health and sanitation, the maneuvers in taking cover, digging fox holes and slit trenches, bayonet practice.

There was no firing with live ammunition, and this didn't surprise Ben in view of the composition of the unit and the surly attitude of the majority of the men around him. They beefed openly among themselves and in the barracks at night, and Ben sedulously avoided discussion of the war.

But he applied himself to doing the job as well as it could be done. He studied the M-1 rifle and the nomenclature of its parts till he could field-strip it blindfolded and reassemble it swiftly. And he was aware that his non-coms had their eye on him and watched him with approval. Well, that was so much to the good.

It was easy to be anonymous in the Army, even when you lived and ate and slept with thousands of men and had no privacy the clock around. It was too easy, in fact, to be alone and lonely, and he was doubly lonely for being unable to get hold of a copy of the *Daily* or the *Masses* or find a reliable guy with whom to discuss what was going on in the Pacific and in Europe.

We had taken a licking in the Philippines, and Manila had been captured. What was happening to Leo and his family? Rommel was on the counter-offensive in North Africa. The immediate threat to Moscow had been liquidated, with the Nazis losing more than 55,000 men. The Red Army and the Russian winter were teaching Hitler the lessons Napoleon had learned in 1812.

Ben had an opportunity to exercise his capacity for deadpan humor during this period, for the more obvious Nazi and fascist-lovers were disconcerted by the news from the Eastern Front. They were constantly quoting General Marshall's estimate that the Soviets would be knocked out of the war in six weeks, but the time-table was now more than eight months behind schedule. They blamed it on the weather.

Ben even permitted himself to accept some bets about the fighting on the Leningrad front, and he consistently won cartons of cigarettes and boxes of cigars (which he gave away because he didn't smoke).

When challenged by a belligerent GI named Schultz as to why he was so willing to bet on the Russians, Ben had an easy answer. "What's a matter, you?" said Schultz. "You a Red, too?"

"Nah," said Ben. "I like to bet. My old man was a gambler."

"How come you know so much about the Russians?"

"I don't know from nothing," said Ben. "But I been hearing for so long how lousy they are, I figured they must be a lot better than the papers say."

"Blau," Schultz remarked. "That's a German name, ain't it?"

"Sure," said Ben. "What'd you think?"

At the end of five weeks, the basic training was suddenly ended, and Ben found himself transferred to the Quartermaster Corps. He was assigned to a warehouse under a sergeant and spent all his time checking bills of lading, receiving-reports, inventories and receipts. He worked for hours on a typewriter and his work was a model of neatness despite his two-fingered typing.

That was around the fifteenth of March and the days were getting hot. A yard bird came in and told him to report to the day room, where the sergeant told him to report to Captain Daley in the office.

"Sir, Private Blau reporting to Captain Daley," said Ben and Daley said, "At ease, Blau. Sit down."

The captain looked at him for a moment, then said, "I understand you were in Spain."

"That's right, sir."

"Which side were you on?"

Ben smiled. "The government side of course."

Daley nodded. "We're having an I & E class tonight. Will you give the company a half hour's talk about that war?"

"I'd be glad to, sir," said Ben before he had made up his mind what he should answer.

"Take the rest of the day off and bone up on it, if you want," the captain said. "That's all." He handed Ben a pass.

Ben rose from the chair, stood at attention and saluted, made an about-face and left the office. Watch yourself, his mind said as he came out of the building and headed for the barracks.

He stopped in his tracks as he entered the company area and decided on the spot. To hell with it! If you're always looking for a trap, you'll be sure to step right into one. You give the talk on Spain and you give it straight. You pull no punches. There isn't a damn thing they can do to you anyhow. And it may be a way to get transferred into the infantry.

There was a letter from Ellen on mail-call that night. It was

like all her letters since he had enlisted; cool and distant, even though it started, *Darling*:

Little Ellen misses you and asks where you are. I showed her the picture you had taken and she says, 'Ben's a sojer.' Then she asked, 'What's a sojer?' and I told her you were going to fight for our country in the war. Then she said, 'Why war?' I could not answer her.

No doubt you could answer her, Ben. I know you could. I know, too, that you hate the war. I tell myself that you were right to enlist; that you'd probably be drafted sooner or later if the fighting gets tougher. As I'm sure it must.

I miss you. I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that. And if I didn't tell you that I've been out to dinner a couple times with Jack. I'm sure you won't object.

When will you get the furlough you told me about?

I could have got it by now, Ben told himself, lying on his back on the cot in the barracks. I could have gone back to New York for a couple weeks and we would have been together, and I could have convinced her. Why didn't I?

5

June 1948

Lang was becoming increasingly nervous as the time approached for his appearance on the witness stand. He felt like an actor in the wings waiting to go on and not at all sure he could measure up to the role he was to play.

He didn't dare sit in the courtroom and listen to the progress of the trial. As a matter of fact, US Attorney Phelps Billings had told him not to turn up till the day of his appearance, when he would make an entrance from the witness room. He was grateful to Billings for this, for he had heard that Anne was in attendance daily and he had a feeling that if he did appear, Blau himself might approach him and blast his present determination to go through with the thing.

His nervousness was fed, not mitigated, by regular doses of cognac, and he experienced a sudden access of sexuality that annoyed Peggy when it didn't amuse her. He thought of it himself as the last flash in the pan. I'm forty-eight years old. I'm an old man hanging by a thread.

Peggy sometimes acceded to his inordinate desire, and his lust played into her hands unexpectedly. He had said nothing about a divorce and so far as she knew, Anne hadn't filed for one. This could go on forever, she figured. Time to bring it to a head.

So more and more she resisted him when he was importunate, and more and more he insisted that he couldn't get enough of her. He protested and fought with her. He begged her not to "give me this Lysistrata stuff." And he showered her with presents; jewelry, which she didn't particularly care for (and often sold), but more often with accessories that the advertising hucksters hawked with such phrases as sensual, irresistible, delectable, seductive, naughty.

He bought skin-tight pants for her that he delighted to rip off and tear in the process. He bought sheer black crepe nightgowns and panties, brassieres that lifted her small but perfect breasts and had small circular openings through which the nipples could protrude, so they could be stimulated by the texture of the blouse or dress she wore and stand erect.

"When are you going to make an honest woman of me?" she asked on one occasion.

"When Anne gets her divorce."

"When's Anne going to get her divorce?"

"How should I know?"

"Why don't *you* ask for a divorce? She deserted *you.*"

"This's New York State," he said. "Adultery's the only grounds for divorce in this state."

"Maybe she's sleeping with this Blau."

He gave her a disgusted glance. "Don't judge other people by us," he said.

"Then why can't you go to Reno?"

"Shut up!" he said. "What kind of a horse's ass would I look like, going to Reno?"

"What makes you so nervous these days?" she said. "The trial?"

"Nervous in the service," he said.

"Are you going to testify?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, *ferme ta gueule, espèce de puce enceinte!*"

"I don't dig you," she said. "If you want to say something sexy, say it in English."

"Peg," he said. "Leave me alone, will you? I've got the screaming meemies."

"Well then, don't take 'em out on me. I only work here."

She wondered about the trial as she worked with him on his

regular broadcasts (he had abandoned the play again). Since he was cooperating with the government, it must be that he didn't have anything to worry about, or did he? She knew enough from her former job with the FBI to know that many prosecution witnesses were hooked in one way or another by the cops.

Maybe that's what makes him so nervous, she thought. Maybe they *do* have a Mann Act rap hanging over his head if he doesn't testify. He had expressed admiration for this guy Blau often enough since she had met him for her to know that he couldn't relish the part he was playing in this affair.

She made it a point to read the *Worker* every day in order to find out what was happening in the trial, and she was astonished to discover that Blau was covering it himself. Imagine that, she thought. What kind of queer birds were these Reds anyhow? How could a man facing five years in the can write about it in this fashion?

But she didn't see the daily transcripts that Billings sent to Zav every night around nine o'clock. Lang kept them locked up in his personal filing cabinet. He read them locked in his study after Peg had left. Or if she was still in the apartment, he studied them in the bathtub and made notes on a ruled pad.

The government had opened with the routine business with the Southern Accent. It merely placed Blau in the Committee room and informed the jury of his testimony. The defense stipulated the transcript.

Then came two witnesses who testified that Blau had been an employe of the *Daily Worker* and the old *New Masses* as far back as 1939, and one witness, an ex-Communist, swore that nobody could be a staff writer for either of these publications unless he was a *bona fide* and trusted member of the party.

Tabatchnik had cross-examined this man and got him to admit that he did not know Blau, had never met him and couldn't prove he was a Communist Party member. What was the point of this? Lang wondered. It seemed like elementary stuff.

The same witness recited a long history of the CPUSA, relating it to the Comintern, which had supposedly been dissolved in 1943 (and from which the CPUSA had disaffiliated even earlier) and which had been re-constituted last year under the name of the Cominform.

Blau's lawyer objected continuously throughout this testimony, insisting that it was incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial (those rubber-stamp phrases) and was prejudicial in the bargain.

Judge Einhorn agreed with Tabatchnik that Blau was not on trial for being a Communist and so instructed the jury, but he

also agreed to admit the testimony into evidence until such time as Phelps Billings demonstrated that it was valid background material for the charge under which the defendant was being tried.

"If the government fails to lay a solid foundation for this material," Einhorn said, "I'll entertain a motion to strike."

Then another former Communist now converted to Catholicism and teaching history in a Catholic university gave a distorted picture of the Spanish war. Tabatchnik really laced into this man and did a bang-up job of cross-examination.

He brought out that the witness was reciting the Catholic hierarchy's version of the war and forced him to admit that there were other versions. The witness blandly admitted that there were, but contended that the other versions were all tainted with Communist ideology. (I can just see him, Lang thought as he read the transcript. His hands are folded in his lap, his eyes are on the ceiling.)

Blau's attorney then quoted a long series of excerpts from books, articles and statements about the war by distinguished and practising Catholics like Larry Fernsworth of the *New York Times,* Haywood Broun, François Mauriac, José Bergamin, Jay Allen, Ossorio y Gallardo, Father Leocadio Lobo, Pablo Casals and a host of others, including a few prelates in France and Mexico, and asked if they were all Communists too. The answer was: they were misled.

Tabatchnik led the witness into a discourse on anti-clericalism, which he demonstrated was a disease endemic to Catholic countries where church and state were one and asked how the professor accounted for this admittedly undesirable condition.

Billings objected and was sustained by the court, who stated unequivocally that he had no intention of permitting the war in Spain to be fought all over again in his courtroom, nor was a dissertation on comparative religion germane to the case at bar.

He did permit Tabatchnik to elicit from the professor of history an admission that well over ninety percent of the Spanish people were Catholics, and a grudging admission that most of them had voted for the Republic despite the Church's admonition that it would constitute mortal sin and that a good many fought against Franco. But his attempt to explain how these millions had also been misled was cut off by the court when Billings objected that the cross-examination was going far afield.

It all reminded Lang of Father Francis X. Lynch's smug reply to his crack about the Moors: "I'll pray for you." Lang was momentarily shaken in his determination to see the thing through

and promptly drowned his faltering decision in Cordon Bleu. *Thus conscience does make . . .*

The last week in June the government presented a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who, under direct testimony, swore that he had gone to Spain at the explicit order of the Communist Party, of which he had been a member. That the Brigades were commanded by Communist military leaders and commissars whose job was to see that the men were kept in line. That the effective leaders of the Spanish government and its armies were also Communists.

"Why were you sent to Spain by the Communist Party?" Billings asked.

"For two reasons," the witness replied. "One, so that Spain could be conquered for Communism if the government won the war; two, so that the American party could develop a trained body of men with front-line experience who could help to bring off the proletarian revolution in the USA."

Tabatchnik made a shambles of this witness, whose name was Allen J. Funston, II. He developed in short order that: 1. he could not name the Communist who had "ordered" him to go to Spain, or explain what would have happened to him if he had disobeyed the order; 2. he had deserted from the front at Belchite (his first action) and stowed away on a British ship in the harbor of Barcelona; 3. there was no Communist Party organization in the International Brigades, any more than there was one in the Spanish Republican Army, as the government had dissolved all the purely political brigades early in 1937 and placed its soldiers under unified command; 4. the Communist Party of Spain had laid aside its socialist program for the duration and loyally supported the government's program for winning the war; 5. he had never received any training in "taking over the government"; 6. he had never heard anyone even discuss "taking over the government"; 7. he could not explain how 20,000 International Brigade men, most of whom were killed, could have taken over the Spanish government, any more than he could explain how 3,000 Americans (of whom 1,800 were killed), could take over the United States government on their return from Spain; 8. the majority of the Spanish people were not committed to a Communist program, or even a socialist program; 9. the only political parties in Spain who demanded immediate collectivization of farms or other socialist measures were the followers of Leon Trotsky, organized in the P.O.U.M., who, together with some anarchists had sparked an outright rebellion against the government in May, 1937, and had been promptly suppressed and disbanded by the government.

It was while Lang was reading the transcript of Funston's testimony that Billings phoned—on the night of June 30—and told him to hold himself in readiness to appear the following afternoon.

Lang was as nervous as a cat and said, "You had a witness shot out from under you today."

"No matter," said Billings.

"Why can't I appear later after you've put on someone who makes a better impression?"

"Believe me, Zav," said Billings, "it's a matter of no importance. The Funston testimony isn't crucial to this case. You're bound to retrieve any ground you think we've lost. Your reputation, your mere appearance and the sort of testimony you will give will create a lasting impression on the jury."

"Couldn't you find anyone better than this Funston?"

"Forget it, will you? We could produce others like him, but they're all equally vulnerable. The only men from the Brigade who are willing to testify were deserters, every one of them."

"He didn't give a very good reason for his desertion."

"Who can?"

"Couldn't he at least have made a passionate speech about how his ideals had been blasted by his experience in Spain, when he found out—you know the sort of stuff?"

"This isn't important, Zav, believe me. Be on tap at noon and have lunch with me, will you? I'll meet you in the grill just around the corner from the courthouse."

"Morituri te salutamus!"

Billings laughed heartily. "You're in no danger of dying, Zav," he said, "You're just at the threshold of your career."

"I'm an old man hanging by a thread."

"See you."

Lang hung up reluctantly, then poured himself a drink. He held up the snifter, then poured the brandy carefully back into the decanter.

You've got to have a clear head, he said to himself. You can't go into court with a hangover. He thought of Peggy, who had left just before the messenger brought the daily transcript, and he reached for the phone. (I want you. I want you. I want you.)

The bell in her apartment rang for a long time, but she didn't answer. Where the hell could the bitch be? he thought. It didn't take long to walk from University Place to Morton Street. Or maybe she didn't go home. Maybe she went to some other guy's apartment when she left here.

To hell with it, he thought. Sex is the opium of the people. "If it please the court," he said aloud, addressing himself in the mirror,

"I am about to tell the lie, the whole lie and nothing but the lie, so help me Satan."

You're just at the threshold of your career, the man said. Now what did he mean by that?

6

15 October, 1942—15 March, 1943

It was nasty in Georgia in October. Rain and gumbo mud, but Ben was feeling fine. His orders had come through a week before, and the next morning he was being shipped out to the infantry replacement center at Fort Bragg.

They were out on a field problem, and he was serving as acting corporal, and he didn't mind the cold rain running down his neck at all. I'm getting into shape again, he thought. It's like Spain again, and it's possible to bear. A soldier is never comfortable, he remembered. It was an old saying. Any time a soldier is comfortable, he isn't a soldier any more.

It goes to show you, he said to himself as he rigged the shelter-half into a pup tent and prepared to bivouac for the night. If you work properly, you get things done. Even if it takes from May to October to accomplish them.

That first talk did it, he figured, the time he spoke to the quartermaster company about Spain at the request of Captain Daley. Daley was a Catholic at that, but he was a liberal Catholic He had been impressed by Ben's discussion of the Spanish war and a couple weeks later he was asked to talk to an infantry battalion and then to the entire regiment.

Public Relations suddenly discovered it had something unique in Blau. It arranged to put him on a local radio station that was running a program called "Meet Our Boys." An article about him even appeared in *The Infantry Journal* with the astonishing title: "His Soul Is Dead, But His Hatred Marches On."

The point the writer (a lieutenant in Public Relations) was trying to make was that Ben's heart had been broken by the defeat of Spain, but his hatred of fascism burned as fiercely as ever.

Guys around the base started to greet him with "Hiya, Dead Soul," when they didn't call him "Professor." And he became a regional celebrity in September when the Armed Services Edition of his book, *Volunteer for Liberty,* appeared in the recreation center, the library and the day rooms.

Guys from other units looked him up. He was going through another stretch of basic training; thirteen weeks of it this time, from June first to mid-September. This had been the direct result of his asking for a transfer to the infantry after his speech to the regiment.

Complimented by General Sharpe after the talk, Ben had had the gall to go over the heads of his immediate superiors and tell the General himself that while he appreciated the compliment, sir, he would feel a lot better in the Army if he could get out of QM into a rifle company, sir.

General Sharpe's eyebrows had risen and his lips tightened. "You're a good enough soldier, Blau," the General said, "to know we go through channels with these things."

"Yes, sir," Blau replied and grinned. "I applied several weeks ago."

The General cracked a smile and said, "I'll think about it, son."

That was when the basic training had begun. That was when he began to be greeted as "Professor" and the men in the barracks at night began to turn to him to settle arguments about everything from women to international politics.

"I seen a movie once," said the wiry little Puerto Rican named Costa. "There was this guy Louis Wolheim, I think it was, he was a sergeant. In the first World War. There were GI's sittin' around, shootin' the breeze, and this Wolheim says, 'I figger if we could get the generals and the kings in a big boxing ring an' let *them* fight it out, maybe there wouldn't be no more wars.' He was a Kraut at that. Whatta you think, Professor?"

A question like this led to an hour and a half's discussion of the first World War and what it was all about, the rise of Hitler and his persecution of the Jews, Spain and religion, the movies and whether they told the truth or not, the newspapers, books and magazines, how you could tell whether a girl loved you, the dangers of venereal disease and the aims of the new war.

On most of these questions Ben had information that impressed the other men to the point where someone would invariably say, "How'd you get so smart, professor?" And this was a question he could never answer seriously, for in discussion he always discovered that he didn't know half enough about any of these topics. So he spent a lot of time in the post library at night boning up on subjects ranging from algebra to Yogi philosophy.

"They say after we lick this Hitler and the Japs, we're gonna have to fight the Russians, Ben. Whatta *you* think?"

"What for?"

"They're Commune-ists. They don't believe in religion or nothing."

"Do you believe in religion?"

"Yes an' no."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think maybe there's a God, 'cause how did everything get started, else . . . but I never go to church."

"Does it make any difference to you that there are millions of people who don't believe in God?"

"Hell, no. Let 'em believe what they like. It's a free country, ain't it?"

"See any reason why you should fight them?"

"Yeah, but what about the Russians beating up on the poor little Finns? What about Poland? And what *is* this Commune-ism anyhow?"

Christ! Ben thought, if the guys would only read something besides comic books. If the I & E courses could only be made vital to them instead of a chore they yawned and slept through and then forgot. If the movies only reflected reality instead of a dream world. If. If. What do you want, Blau? Socialism? (Answer: Yes.)

There was so much basic good-will in the men, so much fundamental decency that was inextricably fouled up by a lifetime of misinformation, misapprehension and outright prejudice that it was difficult at times to see how such a heterogeneous mob could be welded into an army that would destroy fascism.

Yet Ben knew that mere *esprit de corps* and the honor of the regiment had served in the past to make brave soldiers of such men. American soldiers had fought courageously in every imperialist war in which they had served, and even plain mercenaries or downright fascists could fight well on sheer discipline alone.

There was a contradiction. There were so *many* contradictions that anyone who hoped to understand his fellow man would have to study him from birth to death before he could hope to gain a reasonable insight into his behavior. You could go further with a class understanding of human conduct than you could any other way, but you couldn't go all the way.

These men, Ben thought, will fight well in Germany and the Pacific even if the "orientation" courses are a farce, even if their officers are Southern white chauvinists who despise the Negro troops they command, even if millions of them actually believe in Hitler's theories of race—that there are superior men and inferior men, that men are better than women and Americans better than anybody else on earth.

When the battalion reached base the next morning Ben was called to the day room (he had already packed his gear) and handed a piece of paper. It informed him that his travel orders had been revoked, his transfer to Fort Bragg countermanded. No explanation. He asked to see the captain but the captain had no more information than the canceled orders themselves contained.

And there was a letter from Ellen. *Dear Ben,* it said:

I will spare you any post-mortems and come to the point. I'm asking you for a divorce and I know you will permit me to get one.

We made a mistake to marry. I made a mistake divorcing Jack. We were both lonely. We were both in need of human affection, companionship, kindliness. You had come home from a war and were unhappy. I was attracted to you immediately. What we had together was good, but it wasn't good enough for either of us.

I must tell you that I'm going to remarry Jack. It's the right thing to do. I know it. We have seen a lot of each other—but we have not been together.

Since adultery is the only grounds for divorce in New York, I am going to Reno. I ask you to forgive me if you can, though I have a feeling that, whether or not you know it today, you will accept this decision without too much suffering.

I tried very hard to make myself into someone I could not ever be. By and large, I share your beliefs but even more I believe I must change myself before I can hope to help change the world. I don't say this in criticism of you. But I cannot really share what seems to you the central thing in your life. I'm limited, I guess.

For you Ben, I pray that you will come out of this war alive and well. I almost know you will. You are so very much alive, and you have so very much to give. And I pray, too, that you will find the kind of woman you really need, a woman who is your equal in every way and who will be able to give more to you than I was ever able to give.

The old one-two, Ben thought. He had an impulse to ask for a furlough, catch an ATC plane to New York and fight it out, but he knew immediately that he wouldn't do it. (You will accept this decision without too much suffering.) True. Why? Don't you love the woman? Yes, I love the woman. Why don't you fight for her? Because you can't hold a woman against her will. Because it's *you* who haven't been able to give—not Ellen. Without too much suffering? He was aware now only of a deep ache in his chest; a desire to be alone which was impossible to indulge, an inability to smile.

After floating a few days, he was attached to the station complement for a week, promoted to corporal and detailed to a training cadre, in which he served a month.

"Thought you was bein' shipped, Perfessor," said Hank Pratt, the Virginia hillbilly.

"Thought so myself."

"You look downgone, Ben," said Pratt. "You look like you done got a Dear John."

"I did," said Ben. "Only it was a Dear Ben."

"No shit?" said Pratt, his wizened face twisted with sympathy. "The dirty bitch."

"No," said Ben, "that's not it. She's a good girl, she's OK."

"You wanna talk about it?" said Hank. "You jes' tell lil ol' Hank Pratt all about it. Do you good, Perfessor."

"Thanks, Hank," said Ben. "I'd rather not, if it's OK with you."

Pratt looked at him quizzically. "Know what I think, Ben?" he said. "I think you're too smart fur this man's army. Read too many books."

"Could be," said Ben, grateful to this illiterate soldier for changing the subject. "Could be."

"Man like you read so many books, he don' set right. You get inta the scrap, fust thing you know you'll be a brass hat an' they got enough brass hats a'ready. Don' need no mo'. Need dogfaces like you an' me."

But the first week in November on maneuvers when Ben was demonstrating a problem involving two platoons, Colonel Wilson, who was observing, called him aside and said, "You're a good leader, young man."

"Thank you, sir," said Ben.

"What're you doing around here anyhow?"

"I wouldn't know, sir. My travel orders were canceled two weeks ago."

"That so?" said the Colonel. And that was all he said. But on 20 November Ben was recommended for Officers Candidate School, and on 15 December he reported to Fort Benning.

There was no point, he decided, in trying to figure out why these things happened. Some cog in one of the IBM machines might have slipped and thrown his card out. It couldn't be anything as important as the impression he had apparently made on Colonel Wilson, who was reputed to be a first-class son-of-a-bitch, a big businessman in civilian life and a wheel in the America First Committee in Chicago before the war.

For the next three months, Ben was swamped in a study of organization, troop movements and logistics. He digested subjects like the evacuation of troops, their replacement and the handling of prisoners of war. He studied military maps, strategy and tactics, engineering data and signal communications. He stood in empty

fields and light growth forests practising "The Voice of Command." He became an expert on all the weapons the infantry used, and he sat in endless classes.

The first week in January a guy in the back of the lecture hall raised his hand and said, "Lieutenant, sir, would you mind explaining the importance of this battle of Stalingrad?"

First-Lieutenant Pike was a young man who was the motion picture version of a staff officer. He stood like a ramrod. His uniform was meticulous and there wasn't a wrinkle in it. His face was made of wood.

"Well," he said, standing before the map of the Eastern Front, "it really doesn't have any tactical or strategic importance whatsoever." He tapped the city on the Volga with his pointer and said, "The point here is that the defense of this city is more a matter of pride than anything else. Staleen had it named after himself. It used to be called Tsaritsyn."

He smiled at the class and said, "Now the Reds surely couldn't afford to lose a city named after Staleen, could they? Heads would roll."

The class laughed politely and Ben held up his hand. "Yes?" said Lieutenant Pike, and Ben stood up.

"Sir," he said. "I beg to differ with you."

Pike's wooden face broke into a smile. He held out the pointer and said, "Suppose you come up here and explain it to us, Blau."

As Ben walked up the aisle of the classroom he wondered what the hell he was doing this for. It was a matter of absolutely no consequence. Or was it? Was it important that these future officers should believe that Stalingrad had no importance aside from the face-saving operation Pike apparently believed in, or was something more important involved?

His throat was dry as he grasped the pointer and Pike elaborately stood aside on the raised platform. Ben pointed at the city, looked at the lieutenant, who nodded encouragement, and said, "It seems to me that this city is the key to the entire Middle East."

He cleared his throat and picked up some courage from the expressions on the faces of the students. "It's a complicated nexus of railroads and highways which service the entire Eastern Front. If it could be invested by the Nazis, several things would happen at once—it seems to me.

"One, the Baku oilfields on the eastern shore of the Caspian would be flanked. So would the entire line of the Volga to the north. But more important, the capture of Stalingrad would open

the way for the Wehrmacht to the Middle East and make possible a juncture with the Japanese, driving west."

He paused and there was a vast silence in the room. He looked at his classmates, but their faces were now expressionless. He looked at Pike.

"Are you through?" the lieutenant said.

"Yes, sir."

"Very clever," said Pike. "Were you there?"

"No, sir."

"How come you know so much, or do you get a cable from Moscow every day?"

Ben was speechless for a moment. Then he lifted his chin and said, "It seems to me, sir, that even a cursory examination of the map leads to that conclusion."

"I can read a map, too, Blau," said Pike. "Sit down!"

On the 14 March, one day before graduation, Ben received orders to report back to Camp Wheeler. And after he had arrived, Colonel Wilson sent for him.

"What happened up there, Blau?" he said.

"I don't know, sir," said Ben. "I understand my grades weren't good enough."

Wilson paced his office for a moment, then went to the files. He riffled cards through his fingers for some time, his back to Ben, drew one out and approached him.

"This is none of my business, Blau," he said. "But from what I've been able to learn, it had nothing to do with your grades." He handed Ben a card. "Take a look in the upper left-hand corner."

Ben looked. In blue ink were the letters, *S.D.*

He looked at the Colonel and said, "What does that mean, sir?"

"Suspected of disloyalty," said Wilson. He took the card back and inserted it in the file, walked to his desk and sat down. Ben was standing at attention. Wilson cleared his throat.

"They tell me you're a Communist," he said.

"I was, sir."

"I've never caught you passing out any leaflets or agitating the men." Ben was silent. "From all I've heard, you're a damned good soldier."

"Thank you, sir," said Ben.

"I'm a businessman, myself. I've done some reading. None of this Communist stuff makes any sense to me. None of Marx's predictions have worked out anyhow, so what's all the shouting about?"

Ben smiled. "This is where I stick my neck out again, sir," he said.

"Go ahead."

"You haven't forgotten the Soviet Union, sir?"

"Was that a prediction?"

"Not exactly," said Ben, "but Marx and Engels did predict that socialism would be the next stage of human society. That was almost seventy years before the Russian Revolution, sir."

"Go ahead," said Wilson, "and skip the sir."

"As a businessman, you must know from personal experience that there's been an increasing concentration of capital in the hands of fewer and fewer people. (Wilson nodded.) Thousands of small and medium sized business enterprises have been eliminated and competition gets less and less intense all along the line."

"True," said Wilson. "That's efficiency."

""We've made enormous strides in technology and fixed capital has become more and more important in the scheme of things. But one of the most important things, it seems to me, sir, is that the business cycles have grown wider and deeper every time we've had one."

"All this is true," said Wilson. "What about it?"

"Marx predicted all these things, a hundred years ago."

"That so?" said Colonel Wilson. He looked at his desk for a moment, then jerked his chin up. "Suppose we get on with the business of winning the war?"

"That's OK with me, sir," said Ben. "I'd like to apply for combat duty again."

Wilson frowned and said, "We do these things through channels, cor—, *Sergeant* Blau. You know that."

7

July 7, 1948

"Now would you please tell the jury what position this woman, Dolores Ibarrúri, occupied in Spain at the time?"

Lang looked at the jury box and said, "She was, of course, the leading figure in the Communist Party of Spain. She was also a deputy in the Cortes, the Spanish parliament, from the province of Asturias."

He felt strangely at ease. The week's delay in his appearance

occasioned by the illness of Judge Einhorn had been a godsend. It had given him time to get his nerves under control (with the aid of phenobarbitol) and bone up on his facts and figures.

"Would you say," asked Billings, "that her influence was confined to the members of her own party?"

"Objection," said Tabatchnik, rising at the counsel table. "A matter of this man's opinion. Forty different observers in Spain at the same time would estimate the influence of Señora Ibarrúri in forty different ways."

"Overruled," said Judge Einhorn, who was facing sidewise in his chair and rocking perceptibly. "I think Mr. Lang's qualifications as an expert have been amply established."

"I asked for Mr. *Lang's* estimate," Billings said, addressing defense counsel. "Not the estimate of forty different people."

"Her influence," said Lang, "was of course far wider than the ranks of her own party. I would say she was the authentic voice of the Spanish resistance to Franco."

"By that you mean . . . I will rephrase that. When Dolores Ibarrúri, known as La Pasionaria, spoke, was she speaking only for the Communist Party of Spain? The government of Spain? Or the people of Spain?"

"In my opinion," Lang said quietly, "when she spoke, Spain itself was speaking."

"In other words . . ."

"Objection."

"Sustained."

Billings riffled through his notes and said, addressing Lang. "I have here a number of names of Spanish political leaders, military leaders of the period."

He looked at Judge Einhorn. "These names are culled from the book the witness wrote, *Madrid Will Be*— as well as from a volume written by the defendant entitled *Volunteer for Liberty*. Mr. Lang," said Billings, "I will read this list of names and then I will ask you a question."

He cleared his throat and Ben, sitting at Tabatchnik's side, thought, how obvious can you get?

"General José Miaja, General Vicente Rojo, chief of the general staff, Antonio Cordón, Colonel of Artillery and Sub-Secretary of the Army of the Land, Colonel Juan Modesto, Colonel Enrique Lister, Vicente Uribe, Minister of Agriculture, Jesus Hernandez, former Minister of Education, General Commissar for War, Major Valentin Gonzales, General Hans (last name unknown), General Walter, otherwise known as Karol Swierczewski, André Marty,

organizer of the International Briagdes, Luigi Gallo, commissar general of the International Brigades, Ludwig Renn, Gustav Regler.

"Now, Mr. Lang, what was the political affiliation of these leaders of the Spanish Republican government and its army?"

"Objection," said Sam. "Whatever the political affiliations of these individuals, I'm certain even Mr. Billings could draw up a list of fifty others who have different affiliations."

"Overruled," said the Judge.

Lang saw Ben watching him and smiled. It's more of a grimace than a smile, Ben thought. Lang looked away, addressing the jury.

"All of them were members of the Communist Party. I believe two or three may have defected by now. I'm not sure."

"I read to you," said Billings, "a telegram addressed to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Spain dated October 1936 and quoted in the May 17, 1938 issue of International Press Correspondence, which reads as follows. Quote. The toilers of the Soviet Union are only fulfilling their duty by rendering every assistance within their power to the revolutionary masses of Spain. They realize that the liberation of Spain from the oppression of the fascist reactionaries is not the private affair of the Spaniards, but the common cause of all advanced and progressive mankind. Unquote."

"That . . . " said Lang, and Billings said, "Just a moment, Mr. Lang," and Tabatchnik sprang to his feet.

"Your Honor," he said. "May the witness be admonished to wait until a question is asked before answering it?"

Billings turned furiously to Tabatchnik and said, "If counsel for the defense can draw a sinister inference from Mr. Lang's obvious familiarity with the telegram, he's at liberty to do so." He turned to Lang. "You *are* familiar with the telegram?"

"It's rather famous," said Lang with a smile. "It's the wire Stalin sent to the Spanish party in reply to one sent by that organization, thanking him and the Russian party for assistance to Spain."

"What assistance did Stalin render to Spain?"

"He sent arms; rifles, machine guns, artillery, tanks, airplanes, aviators as well as, in the early days, some military advisors."

"Now, Mr. Lang," said Billings, "as a foreign correspondent with many years experience, is it your opinion Stalin would have sent aid to the Spanish government if he were not vitally concerned with the outcome of that struggle?"

"I object," said Sam, "No foundation has been laid."

"Sustained," said the judge. "The jury may draw the proper inference."

"Do you know of any instance when Stalin or his predecessor, Lenin, ever sent military assistance or advisors to any *capitalist* nation?"

"Objection," said Sam. "This is scarcely probative."

"Overruled."

"I do not," said Lang.

"Now," said Billings with a smile, "what was the role of the Communist International in this particular war?"

"It determined to a great extent the conduct of the struggle," said Lang, "though I doubt that it had much bearing on the outcome. The weight of fascist armament was far too heavy."

"Would you care to elaborate on that a bit?"

"Stalin and the Communist International were highly influential in the conduct of the war as evidenced by the many political leaders and military leaders who were, as I have testified, Communists; the many foreign Communists who occupied posts of command in the Republican Army; the tremendous agitation which arose throughout the world during the struggle—agitation admittedly organized and carried out by the Communist parties of the world."

'Very good," said Billings. Then, as an afterthought, "Incidentally, sir. In his testimony before the Un-American Activities Committee the defendant mentioned the name of a man who he said was the commander of the American volunteers training for frontline action. His name was . . . " (he referred to his notes) "Major Thompson." He looked at Lang. "Did you know this Major Thompson?"

"I met him."

"Do you know what were his political ties?"

"He was a Communist."

"To what division was the Lincoln Battalion attached?"

"The 35th Division of the Spanish Republican Army."

"Who was the Commander of that Division?"

"He was called General Walter."

"Is that his real name?"

"His real name is Karol Swierczewski. He's a Pole."

"His politics?"

"He's a Communist, and after the war in Spain ended he returned to Poland—via the Soviet Union, I believe—fought in the war against the Germans and is now Deputy Minister of National Defense of the Polish government."

"Which is a Communist government?"

"Which is a Communist government."

"Now, Mr. Lang. Is there any essential difference between a foreign Communist who is, as has been testified, a member of an international organization controlled by the Soviet Union, and a disciplined member of the army of the Soviet Union itself?"

"Objection," said Sam. "This is the rankest sort of leading question!"

"Overruled," said the judge. "It seems to me that such a question falls within the bounds of the witness's competency as an expert."

"There is not," said Lang. He realized that the direct examination was drawing to a close, and he was becoming increasingly nervous. So far it had been a breeze, but all Billings' assurances collapsed about him as he noticed both Tabatchnik and Ben Blau furiously making notes at their table.

"Are you acquainted with the defendant, Ben Blau?"

"I have known him, met him, sporadically, since 1938."

"Do you have any reason to bear him any ill will?"

"To the contrary. I know him to be a courageous man, honestly devoted to his convictions."

"Did he ever discuss his political affiliations with you?"

"He did."

"Where and when?"

"In 1939, in my home, he told me he was a Communist."

"Do you have any evidence that he is still a Communist?"

Tabatchnik rose. "Objection," he said. "Irrelevant."

"Sustained."

Billings turned to Sam and said, "Your witness."

"Your Honor," said Sam, "I would like at this time to address a motion to the Court."

Judge Einhorn swung around in his chair and faced the courtroom. Ben noticed that the judge's face was entirely expressionless. There was nothing to be told from it. Einhorn turned to Tabatchnik and said, "What is your motion?"

"I would like to move, Your Honor, to strike all of Mr. Lang's testimony on the ground that it has no probative value, is prejudicial to my client and does not connect him in any way with the crime alleged."

Judge Einhorn took off his octagonal glasses and said, "The motion is denied. The Court will be in recess until two o'clock this afternoon . . ."

"Now, Mr. Lang," said Tabatchnik, "who was the President of the Spanish Republic in 1938?"

"His name was Manuel Azaña."

"Was he a Communist?"

"No."

"Who was the Prime Minister?"

"Juan Negrin."

"Was he a Communist?"

"He was not," said Lang, thinking, if it's going to be this easy, there's nothing to it.

"Who was the foreign minister of Spain?"

"Alvarez del Vayo. He was not a Communist."

"Thank you," said Sam. "I didn't ask."

"It was your next question," said Lang with a faint smile.

"Are you a mind reader as well as an expert on foreign affairs?"

"I would admonish both defense counsel and Mr. Lang not to wrangle with each other," said Judge Einhorn.

"Do you know the date of the last free election held in Spain?" said Sam.

"I believe it was in February, 1936."

"Do you know how many Communist deputies were elected at that time to the Cortes, the parliament?"

"I think there were fifteen."

"Out of how many deputies?"

"About four hundred and fifty."

"Four hundred and seventy-three, to be exact," said Tabatchnik. "At the time of the Franco uprising in July, 1936, how many Communists were members of the cabinet?"

"None. But some came into the cabinet later . . ."

"Did they seize power by a *coup d'état* or were they appointed by constitutional means?"

"They were appointed."

"By constitutional means?"

"By constitutional means."

"Are you familiar with the Thirteen Points of the Spanish Republican government promulgated by Prime Minister Negrin on April 30, 1938 and representing the war aims of that government?"

"Reasonably familiar. I could not cite them all."

"Did these Thirteen Points represent a program for socialism for Spain?"

"No."

Tabatchnik handed to the clerk, who passed it on to the judge, a pamphlet, and said, "I offer in evidence the official program of

the Spanish Republican government, to which I have just referred, printed in Barcelona in May, 1938."

"If there is no objection," said Judge Einhorn, "it will be received." Billings was silent.

"Now Mr. Lang," said Sam, "would you describe this government, the government that was elected in the spring of 1936 and against which Franco rebelled in July of that year as a Communist or even a socialist government?"

"No, I would not."

"You attended a Communist Party congress in Madrid, in May of 1938, did you not?"

Lang sat silent, his face a picture of surprise.

"It's in your book, Mr. Lang. *Madrid Will Be—*," said Tabatchnik.

"Of course," said Lang, chagrined that he had not even remembered that he had devoted a chapter to the party plenum he had attended at the invitation of Dolores Muñoz.

"Perhaps you would like to refresh your memory of that meeting," said Tabatchnik, offering him from the counsel table a copy of the book, "and tell us whether you heard anything at that meeting that would cast any light on previous testimony in this trial, to the effect that the Spanish Communists were interested in taking over the government . . ."

"Your Honor, I object," said Billings. "Mr. Lang has not testified as to this meeting, and I object further to the inference that he would need to refresh his memory from his own book."

"I will overrule the objection," said Judge Einhorn, "though I grant you the inference was rather gratuitous."

"Very well," said Sam. "Mr. Lang, at this Communist Party congress, did you hear anything that, in the mind of a shrewd and experienced foreign correspondent, would have tended to indicate that the Communist Party of Spain was not in fundamental agreement with and support of the Spanish Republican government of the time?"

"No," said Lang.

"It supported that government?"

"It did, for the time being."

"Did it at any time during the war oppose that government?"

"It did not."

"You said the Soviet Union sent arms to the legal government of Spain. I will ask you, did any other government send arms to the Spanish government?"

"The Republic of Mexico."

"I will ask you again, were these arms—in either or both instances—a free-will gift and offering, or were they sold?"

"They were sold."

"In accordance with international law, the Spanish government exercised its sovereign right to purchase arms for its defense from whatever government would sell them?"

"That's right."

"Now, Mr. Lang," said Sam. "Did the armies of General Franco receive assistance from any outside source?"

"They did."

"What sort of assistance?"

"Hitler sent armaments of all kinds to Franco; so did Mussolini, as well as supplying several divisions of troops."

"Several divisions of soldiers?"

"Your Honor," said Billings, rising, "we will stipulate that the Franco forces received important assistance from both the German and Italian governments."

"Thank you," said Tabatchnik. "I am interested in establishing the fact that the assistance rendered to Franco by the Nazi-Fascist Axis was something more than the few arms sent to the Republic, most of which finally arrived at the bottom of the Mediterranean. I am interested in establishing the fact that without the assistance . . ."

"The government will so stipulate," said Billings.

Sam turned to Lang. "You testified, I believe, that you had never heard of the Soviet Union sending arms or advisers to any capitalist nation struggling for its existence. Is that correct?"

"Correct."

"Did you know of the assistance offered by the Soviet Union to France in 1935, to Czechoslovakia in 1938? To both Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1939?"

"No arms were sent."

"Was that because the French, Czech and Polish governments refused them or because the Soviets changed their minds?"

"The Munich Pact killed the Franco-Soviet agreement," said Lang. "So far as Czechoslovakia and Poland were concerned, I believe the assistance was refused."

"You said the Major Thompson who trained American volunteers in Spain was a Communist. Did he show you his party card?"

"Of course not."

"Did he tell you he was a Communist?"

"No."

"Then how did you know he was a Communist?"

Lang was silent for a few moments.

"How did you know Major Thompson was a Communist?"

"He talked like one."

"How does a Communist talk, Mr. Lang?"

"Objection."

"Your Honor." said Sam, "Mr. Lang has just said that Major Thompson talked like a Communist. I think the question is proper."

"I will overrule the objection."

"Well," said Lang, shifting his position in the witness chair, "that's a question that would take some explanation to answer."

"Perhaps I can help you," said Tabatchnik, taking a typewritten sheet of paper from his table. "I will read you a statement. Quote. . . . the great democracies were so blinded by anti-communist passion that they fell easy prey to the lies of international fascism . . . there was never any danger of communism in Spain although the Spanish Communist party and the Communist parties of the world gave an example of unselfish devotion which has no parallel in modern history. Unquote. Does that passage, Mr. Lang, sound as though it were written by a Communist?"

"It was written by me," said Lang with a tight smile. "If you're interested in laying a trap for me, you'll have to select a passage I have forgotten."

Tabatchnik was silent for a long moment, then smiled slowly. I can see what's coming, Lang thought, his mind figuring rapidly what he would have to say.

"Nobody's interested in trapping you, Mr. Lang," Sam said, "although that last statement was quite interesting." He paused again. "Let me ask this question. Does the passage I just read reflect the truth of the situation it describes?"

"It does."

"Is this passage, in other words, a statement of fact?"

"Yes."

"Does it sound as though it were written by a Communist?"

Lang's mind was now racing like a squirrel in a cage. This is unfair, he thought. This is below the belt. He decided to brazen it out and see what happened.

"It could have been," he finally said, realizing that the next question would pin him to the mat.

"Do you know who was the American Ambassador to the Spanish Republic during the war?" Sam said and Lang nearly gasped. Was he going to let this advantage slip, or was this another trap? Why?

"Claude G. Bowers," Lang said.

"Did you meet him?"

"I went up to Saint-Jean-de-Luz to interview him, yes."

"Which side of the Spanish struggle did Ambassador Bowers favor, do you know, or was he neutral?"

"He was entirely on the side of the legitimate government."

"Was he a Communist?"

"He was not."

"Do you know what President Roosevelt's attitude was?"

"I believe he favored the Republic though he naturally could not take sides in that conflict."

"As a matter of fact," said Sam, "isn't it true that before he died Mr. Roosevelt expressed himself as believing that the United States government had made a mistake in not permitting the sale of arms to Spain?"

"There was a well-substantiated rumor to that effect, yes," said Lang.

"I will not ask you whether Mr. Roosevelt was a Communist," said Sam.

"I move to strike counsel's remark," said Billings, indignant.

"The remark will be stricken," said the judge, and Sam asked for a five-minute recess to consult his client.

Moving from the witness chair to the government's table, Lang could not tear his eyes from Sam and Ben as they sat with their heads together, consulting notes and writing memoranda for each other. He felt that he had acquitted himself well up to this point, and Billings congratulated him and assured him he had nothing to worry about. But he could not help feeling that the five-minute recess was a form of psychological warfare directed against him by Blau and his attorney.

When the cross-examination resumed, Tabatchnik asked mildly, "Mr. Lang, what ever became of General Walter?"

"I know nothing of him beyond what I have already said."

"You said he was presently the Deputy Defense Minister of the People's Republic of Poland and a member of the Central Committee of the Workers Party of that nation, did you not?"

"That's correct."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lang," said Sam, "don't you know very well that General Walter—Karol Swierczewski—was killed by fascists on the Polish border on March 28, 1947, over a year ago?"

"I do not," said Lang. "But if he was, I would call them Polish patriots, not fascists. Poles who don't want to live under Communism."

"You would?" said Sam and Lang thought, When is he going to open up? When is he going to get at me?

"You also stated," said Tabatchnik, "that the present Polish government was a Communist government, is that correct?"

"I did. And it is."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lang, don't you know that the Polish government represents a democratic bloc, a government coalition of four legal political parties, of which only one, the Workers Party, contains Communists?"

"That's absurd," said Lang, feeling his abdominal muscles tighten. "The Communists dominate it."

"In what way?"

"In the same way they dominated the International Brigades."

"How did they dominate the Brigades?"

"They organized it. Their activists were in key positions of authority and power."

"You were a member of the Brigades?"

"No."

"Are you familiar with the tables of organization of the Brigades?"

"No."

Lang was suffering from a strange illusion, and he glanced at Ben for confirmation or negation of the curious impression he had developed. Tabatchnik's voice had begun to sound like Ben Blau's voice. Ben seemed to be talking through his lawyer's mouth. He saw that Ben was staring at him and averted his eyes; but not before he noticed what he thought was a slight movement of Ben's lips, as though he were the ventriloquist and Tabatchnik the Charlie McCarthy. It was uncanny.

"Did you meet men in the International Brigades who were *not* Communists?" Tabatchnik was saying.

"Certainly."

"Many such men?"

"A good many."

"Did they tell you they had been ordered to go there by the Communist Party?"

"Many were idealists," said Lang and smiled a tortured smile. "Many were Marxists."

"Did you meet the defendant in Spain?"

"I did."

"When did you first meet him?"

"In April 1938, during the retreats through Aragón."

"Did he tell you why he came to Spain?"

"He came as a correspondent, joined the Brigade, later became a Communist."

"Did *any* man you met in Spain, who actually identified him-

self as a Communist, tell you he had been sent by the Communist Party?"

"The question is absurd," said Lang.

"Why?"

"Communists don't talk that way."

"But you won't tell us how Communists talk?"

"Objection."

"Sustained."

"Please answer the question," said Sam.

"I can't remember that any one did," said Lang.

"But it's still your contention that Communists went to Spain under orders.?"

Billings rose. " Mr. Lang is not contending anything, if it please the court. He is merely testifying as to the facts."

"In any case, Mr. Lang, you have no personal knowledge that any Communist of your acquaintance was ever ordered to go to Spain to fight for the Spanish Republic, have you?"

"I have not," said Lang, his eyes drawn again to Ben, who this time, to his relief, was looking at the table.

"What is your opinion, Mr. Lang, of a man who betrays his trust?"

"I don't understand."

"It's a simple question," said Sam. "What is your opinion of a man who betrays his fellow man?"

"It may be a simple question," said Billings, rising, "but I fail to see its relevancy here. I object to it."

"What is the purpose of the question, Mr. Tabatchnik?" said the judge.

"I am laying a foundation, your Honor," Sam replied. "I ask your Honor's indulgence—that I not be required to reveal the purpose."

"I'll allow the question." said the judge, "and you may reserve a motion to strike, Mr. Billings."

"Now, please answer my question," said Tabatchnik.

"It's a generalization," said Lang. "But I'll say that I hold a low opinion of any man who betrays a fellow man."

"How many times did you meet the defendant in Spain?"

"Two or three times, I believe."

"What was the next time you met him, after Spain?"

"In December 1938, in Le Havre."

"Up to that time, had you developed any hostility to him?"

"To the contrary," said Lang with a smile.

"Did you lend Mr. Blau money in New York in 1939?"

"I did. And he paid it back."

"Did you urge your publisher, Mr. Chadwick, to accept a book Mr. Blau was writing, called *Volunteer for Liberty?*"

"I did. It was a good book."

"Did you have a quarrel with Blau in 1939—around September fifteenth?" (Oh-oh, thought Lang. Here it comes. Even if he muffed it the first time, he won't this time.)

"I don't remember a quarrel. I remember a heated discussion." (He glanced at Ben, saw him looking at him and glanced away, only to catch Anne's eyes. He looked down.)

"Do you remember the subject matter of what you call a heated discussion, and I choose to call a quarrel?"

"I do not," Lang said firmly. (It was a safe answer.)

"September 17, 1939, to be specific," said Sam.

"I cannot recall."

After a pause, Sam said, "Was it because you were dead drunk that you don't remember or . . ."

"Objection!"

"Sustained."

"Mr. Lang," said Tabatchnik, "have you ever been confined to a mental institution?"

"Never," said Lang firmly. He was furious.

"Have you ever been treated by a psychoanalyst?"

Lang was silent, blushing, and Billings said, "Your Honor, literally millions—well, hundreds of thousands of people have been treated by psychoanalysts, and . . ."

"Is this an objection?"

"It is. On the grounds of irrelevancy."

"Overruled."

"Yes," said Lang, miserably. That son of a bitch Morton had screwed him three ways from Sunday, it occurred to him. He had probably tipped off the FBI to his brief membership in the party, and now they were using him in court to destroy his reputation. He wondered why Tabatchnik didn't get to the point on which he was really vulnerable, the Communist Party business.

"When you were in Spain, Mr. Lang, as a correspondent for the wire services, did you also serve as an intelligence agent for the United States government?"

"I did not," said Lang, recalling that the Un-American Committee had asked the identical question.

"But as a newspaperman," said Sam, "you certainly cooperated with the American Embassy and the military attaché of the US Army, did you not?"

"What do you mean by cooperate?"

"The way all accredited correspondents cooperate, Mr. Lang," said Sam. "By supplying information when asked for it."

"I move to strike the question," said Billings. "It assumes something that is not in evidence."

"It will be stricken," said Einhorn.

"Do you recall a member of the Lincoln Battalion named Joe Faber?"

(Oh, thought Lang, no! *No!* This was Blau talking, all right. He tried desperately to remember what he had said to him that night in 1939 when he was stinking and Ben asked about . . . What would happen if I said, No, I don't remember him? Then he will put Busch on the stand and the others who were there when . . .)

"I think so," Lang said finally, and Billings caught the distress in his eyes and rose.

"Your Honor," he said. "I simply must object. The name of Mr. Faber (is it?) has not been previously mentioned in this case. The question is immaterial."

"What are you driving at, Mr. Tabatchnik?" said Einhorn.

"This is the subject I referred to earlier, your Honor," said Sam. "It relates to the entire question of Mr. Lang's credibility and his reliability as a witness in this case."

"You may proceed."

"Mr. Lang, you said you *think* you remember Mr. Faber. Didn't you meet him early in April 1938, the same day you first met the defendant in this case?"

"I think so."

"Didn't you meet him again later in 1938, during a rest period near the Ebro River?"

"Yes."

"Didn't you, as a matter of fact, see him die on top of Hill 666 in the Sierra Pandols on August 19, 1938 as a result of wounds from a fascist mortar shell?"

"I can't be certain of the date."

"But you saw him die?"

"I did."

"Now, going back to the second time you met Joe Faber on the Ebro during a rest period, did Faber give you a notebook?"

(This *is* Blau speaking, the dirty son of a bitch, Lang thought, his mind racing. This is what he's leading up to! Damn that Billings. Why couldn't he have foreseen this! You didn't tell him, his mind replied. Well, I'll be screwed if I'll go along with it. I'll be damned if I'll cooperate in my own destruction in the eyes of

the public. *What do you think of a man who betrays his* . . . It's either Blau or me, and it isn't going to be me!)

"He did," he replied.

"Didn't he ask you to mail that personal notebook to a Miss Nellie Pindyck of Philadelphia, his fiancée?"

"Yes. I know nothing about his sex-life."

Sam did not comment on the crack but paused to allow the jury to absorb it. Then he said, "Did you mail it?"

"No."

"Did you lose it?"

Lang was silent.

"Did you give it to the American Embassy?" said Tabatchnik, pressing the advantage and grateful to Ben for insisting that he follow this line of questioning against his own judgment that it was risky and likely to lead to nothing.

(Good Christ, Lang thought, maybe they *know* I gave it to Brinker, the assistant military attaché, but how *could* they know that unless they have spies in the US Army or Brinker the stinker was one of them or . . .)

"Or did you give it to the American military attaché in Spain?"

"Your Honor," said Billings, "Counsel for the defense has asked three questions and has not given the witness an opportunity to answer."

"He can have all the time he wants," said Sam. "And he can answer any one of them."

Lang was shaken. He looked at Billings who was looking at the floor, the bastard. He couldn't say yes and he couldn't say no. Saying I don't remember, like this, he realized, made him extremely suspect in the eyes of the jury, that was listening with fascinated attention. *L'attaque,* he thought, *toujours l'attaque.* But prepare it.

He knew now that he hated this ugly man standing in front of him with such amazing composure and self-assurance. Funny thing. Blau was as ugly as Tabatchnik, and Tabatchnik was as ugly as Blau. In a way, they looked something like each other. Why are Communists so ugly, he wondered. Why do they always look somewhat foreign? He realized suddenly that he had really hated Blau from the moment he met him. Leave it to these Reds. They wouldn't hesitate to destroy a man—the moment he disagreed with them—even if he'd done them all the favors in the world!

"I may have," he finally said.

"What do you mean, you *may* have? Can't you remember a simple thing like that?"

"It was a long . . . it was ten years ago."

"You remember meeting Faber three times. You remember his

giving you the notebook. You remember his asking you to mail it to Miss Pindyck, and you don't hesitate to slur her name . . ."

"Objection."

"Sustained."

"You remember that you didn't mail the notebook," said Tabatchnik, "but you don't remember what you did with it?"

"I remember now," said Lang with sudden passion. "I gave it to the assistant military attaché, Brinker was his name, I don't remember the first name . . ."

There was a stir in the courtroom and the judge rapped his gavel and said sternly, "If there are any demonstrations I will clear the room immediately."

"You gave it to the American military attaché," Sam said slowly and with obvious scorn, "but when Joe Faber lay dying on top of Hill 666, and he asked you if you had mailed his notebook, you told him you had mailed it from Paris! Do you remember *that*?"

"No!" said Lang, with heat. "But it would make no difference to me. My first allegiance is to the government of the United States. The government of the United States was interested in what was going on in Spain, and as an American correspondent I was interested in helping my government in any way I could. I don't owe allegiance to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or . . ."

Billings was on his feet but Sam interrupted. "You're a literary man," he said hotly. "No doubt among the things you *do* remember is Samuel Johnson's famous statement: 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel!' "

"Your Honor," said Billings, "I must ask you to halt this unseemly demonstration on the part of counsel for the defense."

"Mr. Tabatchnik," said Judge Einhorn, "I will have to terminate this examination if you are going to badger the witness."

"Thank you, your Honor," Sam said quietly. "I am through."

8

July 7, 1948

Court recessed at four in the afternoon and Lang left Foley Square immediately, fending off reporters at the courtroom door, in the corridors and on the front steps leading into the street. "I have nothing to say," he kept repeating. "My testimony speaks for itself. I cannot comment on a case in process."

One man in the corridor, obviously not a reporter, stopped him, cried, "Judas!" and made a grimace as though he were about to spit in his face. Lang dodged rapidly away. A woman who had followed him into the elevator said, "I thank God for you, Mr. Lang. I thank God."

Lang was embarrassed. The woman kept staring into his face all the way down, as though he were the image of Jesus Christ. She resembled those old women he had seen in Spain in the days of Alfonso who spent all their time from morning to night in church, and were known as *beatas.*

He hopped a cab and directed the driver to One University Place. It had been arranged in advance that Peggy would not leave the courthouse with him but would come to the apartment in time for dinner.

Lang was baffled. He could not understand why Ben's lawyer had failed to hammer home the fact that he had once been a member of the Party himself. Wouldn't that have damaged him even more effectively than the business about Faber's god-damned notebook?

It had been agreed with Billings, of course, that the matter would not be brought out in direct examination, but what had prevented Tabatchnik from revealing it? Ben had certainly told him and the lawyer had hinted all around it in cross-examination, without ever forcing the issue. Why? More psychological warfare?

Then it occurred to him that these characters saw nothing wrong in being a Communist and would scarcely use the fact of his former, six-month membership as a stick with which to beat him. A peculiar sense of ethics, he thought; something like honor among thieves.

Well, to hell with it. The important thing was: how would the papers handle his appearance? Would they be sympathetic to him or to Blau? What chance was there of *that,* in this atmosphere? his mind replied. But you never could tell. A fine thing! He could be certain of sympathetic treatment only from the papers he despised: the Hearst press.

Walking down the hallway on his floor, he saw a man standing in front of his door. The man advanced to meet him, said, "Mr. Lang, Tim Gallard of the *Journal.*" (Talk of the Devil!)

"I can't comment on a case in process," Zav said, and Gallard smiled. "I don't want to talk to you about that."

"Oh?" said Lang, opening the door with his key. "Come in for a minute. I don't have too much time."

In the study he offered Gallard a drink, and the reporter took

it gratefully, staring around the room in admiration. "Nice layout you have here," he said, and sat in an overstuffed chair.

"What can I do for you, brother?" said Lang.

"I met Mrs. Lang in the courtroom the first day," the newspaper man said, sipping his drink. "She's been there every day."

"Is that so?"

"She tells me you have separated."

Lang took a deep slug of his brandy before he answered. "She told you the truth," he said.

"Would the separation have anything to do with this Blau case?" said Gallard holding the glass in his hand and pretending to look through it.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," said Lang.

"Oh?" said Gallard. "Should I ask Mrs. Lang?"

"What I mean is," said Lang with a smile, "you're on the wrong scent. There's no story there."

"I'm sorry . . . or rather, I'm glad," Gallard said laughing. "I thought there might be."

"Why?"

"You never can tell these days," the reporter said. "More people than you can shake a stick at separating because of political differences. Why, we even had a story a couple weeks back of a husband demanding custody of the kids in a divorce case because the wife was a Red. Got 'em, too, despite the fact that the wife proved he was a bastard of the purest ray serene, beat her, had three girl-friends, drunk."

Gallard was thinking, somebody's a liar here. She says she's interested in what happens to Blau. He testifies against Blau, which means he's *not* interested—or he's interested with reverse English. They separate—when was it?

"Do you mind a question?" he said, and Lang shook his head. "When did you and Mrs. Lang separate?"

Lang laughed. "You can't make anything out of that, brother," he said. "Happened last February, and it was a long time coming. Just one of those things."

"I don't mean to intrude."

"Forget it," said Zav. "I was a newspaperman myself once."

Gallard tossed off the drink, rose. "What do you mean, once? You're one of the best." (Even in February, he was thinking, it clicks. He could have known in February that he was going to appear.)

"I thank you," said Lang.

"Don't be surprised if you get an offer from my paper for a series of articles."

"I wouldn't touch Hearst with a fifty-foot pole," said Lang. "No offense intended to a colleague. I was a Hearstling myself once."

Gallard laughed. "As the whore said when the reformer asked how she could fall so low, 'It's a living.' "

They shook hands and Gallard left, thinking, it makes a good little side-bar anyhow. Write it straight and factual; no editorializing, no comment, like the man says. He says no. She says yes. Who's kidding who? But maybe I could get something out of the lady herself.

Lang had started to work on the brandy, wondering where the hell Peggy was (it was nearly six o'clock). Billings took a good deal of the curse off that diary business in the redirect examination, he was thinking. By building up the patriotic angle. But that Jew-boy lawyer was right: *the last refuge* . . .

The epithet that had run through his head suddenly startled Lang, and he stood still in the middle of the floor. I'm not an anti-Semite, am I? I haven't had a thought like that since I abandoned Catholicism in my twenties. I don't really believe Jews or, for that matter, Negroes, either, are inferior to their fellow men. I've been too many places, met too many human beings to believe in crap like that. How come that phrase popped into my head? (Blau would have an explanation for it, all right.)

The phone rang and he flopped in his desk chair and picked up the instrument.

A male voice said, "Lang?"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you go back to Russia, you Jew bastard?"

"What the hell're you talking about?"

"I was in court," the voice said. "I heard you testify. I know a Communist when I see one. We're gonna get rid of people like you."

Lang hung up and poured himself another drink. The phone began to ring again, and he decided not to answer it. Then he decided he would answer it and give that moron a piece of his mind. He was reminded of the cartoon about the innocent bystander being clubbed by a cop and yelling, "But I'm an *anti*-communist!" and the cop bringing the club down on his skull, shouting, "I don't give a damn *what* kind of a Communist you are."

He picked up the phone and said angrily, "Lang."

A quiet voice replied. "A soft answer, Francis, turneth away wrath."

"Who's this?"

"Your namesake," the voice replied. "Lynch. Francis Xavier."

Lang couldn't speak for a moment, then he said, "Forgive me, Father."

"Monsignor to the rest," said Lynch with a chuckle, "but you may call me Father if you wish."

"Long time no see," said Lang.

"Long time. But I saw *you* today."

"In court?"

"I was there. I wish to express my admiration and my gratitude."

"What in Christ's name for?" said Lang with amazement.

"You struck a mighty blow for freedom," Lynch replied. "It was no less than I expected of you. But you *do* seem to have forgotten the Second Commandment."

Lang was feeling the brandy now and his tongue was loose. "I've forgotten all ten," he said. "I have no God. I take His Name in vain. I don't keep holy the Lord's Day. I don't honor my father and mother . . ."

"Enough," said Lynch quietly. "I don't believe a word of it, Francis. Your true nature was revealed today."

"How?"

"In what you said. In how you comported yourself. I was aware, as you are aware, that this trial is your personal Calvary. I prayed for you. You will be cursed for your testimony today. The newspapers will revile you. Those who do not understand will condemn you."

"But you understand?"

"The faithful will understand, Francis," said Lynch.

Lang took a drink and said, "*You* seem to have forgotten the Eighth Commandment, Father."

"You did not bear false witness."

"A lot *you* know, Monsignor."

"What seems the truth, Francis, is frequently not the truth at all. And what seems not to be the truth often turns out to be true."

"Balls!" said Lang.

"I forgive you," said Lynch. "Why don't you come and have dinner with me some day?"

"I'm not worthy to touch the hem of your garment," Lang said, his eyes brimming suddenly with tears. "I commit adultery. I covet my neighbor's wife. I steal. I kill."

"You're upset, Francis," the quiet voice said. "You are suffering."

"You give me too much credit."

"I know what you're capable of. You have not lost it. You can write like an angel even though the devil himself has guided your pen far too long." He paused. "Come to dinner, Francis."

"Let me think about it," said Lang.

"Don't think too long." said Lynch.

"I won't."

"I will pray until you call," said Monsignor Lynch and hung up before Zav had a chance to say goodbye. This miffed him, for it was one of his own peculiar habits and he didn't like anyone to do it to him.

He hung up slowly, hearing the key in the front door. He looked at his watch. It was nearly seven. He sat at his desk until Peggy came into the study, and he saw at once that she was tight.

"Where the hell were *you?*" he said. "I've been waiting since four-thirty."

"Ran into an old admirer," she said, and primped her hair. "Well, not so old at that, he's only thirty."

"And?"

"And we had dinner."

"You had a date with me for dinner."

"Her Master's Voice," she said. "Are you my mistress or am I your master? Sometimes I wonder."

He stared at her. She had often been tight, but he had never seen her in this mood. Getting independent on me, he thought, trying the old make-'em-jealous routine. Well, screw her. But he was curious to find out more.

"Gimme some of that French rotgut you're so fond of," she said. He poured brandy into a snifter, handed it to her.

"You've got quite a load on right now," he said.

She lifted the glass to him and snickered. "Look who's talking," she said. "The president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union." She sipped the brandy.

"Are you going to see him again?"

"Why not?" she said, staring into the snifter. "He's cute."

"What's his name?"

"Young Man With a Horn."

"What does that mean?"

"Mean?" she said. "Didn't you give me that nineteenth century piece of British pornography called 'The Horn Book,' and didn't you tell me what a horn was?"

"What made you come here instead of going to bed with *him?*" he asked.

"Oh," she said airily, "I can go to bed with him any time I want."

"Did you like it?"

"What are you?" she said, "a *voyeur?*"

Lang took a step as though to smack her and she spoke without

looking up. "Don't do it." Then she looked at him. "I'm not too pleased with you today, my lord and master."

"No?" he said, "Why not?"

"I'm an old-fashioned American girl. Hundred percent." She swigged on the brandy, then swished it around in her snifter. "I was brought up to despise a snitch."

"God damn it," said Lang, "what the hell do you mean by *that?*"

"It's plain English, isn't it?" she said, widening her eyes. "A snitch is a snitch. I don't like 'em."

"Are you on Blau's side now?"

"Hell no," she said. "Guys like Blau are creeps. I've known lots of 'em." She waved one arm. "Out to save the world when they can't keep their own noses clean. Wet behind the ears."

"Then what . . ."

"A man doesn't tell on his friend if he's his friend."

"Who said he was my friend?"

"You. Many a time. You told me about him by the hour." She shook her head dolorously. "Nothing's lower than a snitch," she said.

"Stop *using* that word!" Lang shouted, "or I'll spoil that silly face of yours."

She widened her enormous eyes and said, "And what would *that* prove, Mister L?"

He was silent, so she went on, "I hear your wife's going to Reno right after the trial."

"Where'd you hear that?"

"Oh, I have my own sources of information," she said with a smirk.

"Did you ask her?"

"Please," she said. "I was brought up proper. I wouldn't *dream* of speaking to my little man's ex unless I was spoken to first."

"Then who told you?"

"A newspaper fellow."

"Gallard of the Journal?"

"None other."

"Why did he tell you such a thing?"

"Who are *you?"* said Peggy. "The FBI?"

"I want to know why he should talk to *you.*"

"Don't you know?" she said, holding out the snifter. He ignored it and she finally put it down. She didn't want any more to drink anyhow. "He's looking for a story for his paper. He knows I'm your secretary. He thought I might know something. I don't."

"When did he speak to you?"

"During the noon recess."

Lang walked across the study and stood looking out the window. He wanted another drink but decided he would discipline himself.

"You'll be a free man soon," Peggy said behind him, and he swung around on his heel and stared at her.

"If you think I'm going to marry *you,*" he said, "you have another think coming."

"Did I ask you?"

"I wouldn't marry you if you were the Virgin Mary," Lang said venomously.

She smiled sweetly at him. "Maybe that's what you'd like at *your* age."

"What?"

"A virgin."

He felt his blood heating up and clenched his fists. He said, "Why don't you get out of here, Peg, and leave me alone? I'm in a low mood today."

"Who can blame you?" she said with a wink. Then, "You know, you must be psychic. That's exactly what I want to do, but I can't do it without money."

"Do what?"

"Airplane tickets cost money, Mister L."

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To Hollywood," she said. "But I want my severance pay."

"Severance pay!" he said with astonishment. "What do you think this is, a newspaper office? I have no contract with you."

"True," she said, looking up at him, "but I thought, seeing you're such a great believer in labor unions and helping the oppressed and all that sort of crap, you might want to give it to me, as well as my expenses back to L.A."

Lang suddenly reached forward, grabbed her by the wrist and yanked her to her feet. "You're not going *anywhere,* do you hear!" he shouted. "You can't play fast and loose with me, you acrobatic bitch."

"You're hurting me," she said, struggling to free her arm.

He released her wrist and slapped her face hard. "You'll stay here as long as I want you," he said, his face red, his eyes bulging. "You'll come when I whistle and you'll lay when I want it, and when I'm through with you, I'll let you know it!"

She said nothing but started for the door. Get out of here, she was thinking, this guy is fruit. He grabbed her arm again and whirled her around to face him.

"Did you *hear* me?"

"I heard you," she said, suddenly finding some courage. "If you

don't leave me alone I'll tell my friend. He'll make mincemeat out of you."

"Who's your *friend?*" he said with a sneer.

"A *man,*" she said, struggling to free her arm. "Not a god damned fairy!"

"God damn *you!*" said Lang and felt his fist fly out and smack her a glancing blow on the jaw.

She staggered backwards, rapidly recovered her balance and planting her feet wide apart, she said, "Maybe you'd like me to tell the Brooks Brothers about us."

"What?" (He couldn't place the reference for a moment.)

"Maybe they'd be interested in knowing how you brought me here from Hollywood and kept me."

"You ass," he said. "If you make a pimp of me, you make a whore of yourself. Are you trying to blackmail me now?"

He didn't give her a chance to reply but started for her and she ran for the door of the apartment. He caught her, slapped her face and punched her in the belly and she went sprawling on the floor.

"Get to hell out of here you cock-sucker," he said. He shifted his weight to kick her, but she was scrambling sideways on the living room floor like a crab trying to get away from him, and he suddenly thought, how amusing, and stood there watching her.

She got to her feet, her eyes wide with fear and ran for the door again and he didn't follow her. Instead, he turned on his heel, went into his study and closed the rolling doors, got the brandy bottle and drank from its neck.

He felt slightly sick to his stomach, somewhat frightened by what he had done. You're a dirty son of a bitch and you know it, his mind was saying. You're a fraud and a bastard and a sadist and what are you going to do about it?

He said aloud. "Nothing!" and took another drink. I'll have to call the Brooks Brothers first, he decided, and give them a gentle hint that there's a transcontinental floozie in town who ought to be put on the first milk train out of here. Or maybe I should have Billings tip them off. It's the least he could do for me.

He saw himself in the mirror and didn't like what he saw. He put the bottle down and looked carefully at himself. What're you *doing* to yourself? You've driven your wife away, lied under oath, sent your friend to prison for five years, beaten up a hundred-pound girl and made yourself an object of contempt and ridicule. *This is just the beginning of your career,* Billings had said.

I have sinned. Father, I have sinned. He moved to the telephone and thought, the time has come. *Call* him. He's waiting. He

knew when he called earlier. You are suffering, he said. How did he know? The ways of God are beyond human understanding! How did he know it was your personal Calvary and that you were suffering? How did he know you were ready to come back to Holy Mother Church?

"Crotte!" Lang said aloud, then crossed himself. Forgive me, oh Lord, I didn't mean it. Father said, I forgive you. He will forgive you. But if Father really knew what sort of a character you were, he wouldn't let you cross his threshold. He wouldn't even pray for you. There are some things that are beyond forgiveness. Didn't Dante put Judas Iscariot in the lowest circle of Inferno, frozen forever in the ice of Cocytus?

Call him anyhow, his mind said. He opened the telephone book. The way is always open for the sincerely repentant sinner. Even for murderers. His finger ran down the page, Lynch, Lynch, Evelyn . . . Everett . . . Foster J. . . . Frances P. . . . Francis X., Monsignor . . .

The phone rang. No! he thought. *Impossible!* A miracle! He *knew*. He picked up the phone, his hand shaking.

A low-pitched, sexy female voice said, "Francis Lang?"

"Yes?"

"This is Carol Masters."

"Who?"

There was a very slight touch of annoyance in the voice as it said, "Carol Masters. The Carol Masters Lecture Bureau."

"Of course," he said, sensing the source of her irritation. Carol Masters was the most successful lecture agent on the East Coast. And he added, "How is it we've never met?"

"I've heard you speak many times, Mr. Lang," the voice said, and it was as though she had made a proposition to him; it had that quality of intimacy and mutual understanding.

"You flatter me."

"I'd like to hear you speak more often," she said. "In fact, I'm fairly certain I can book you on a nation-wide tour if the idea interests you at all."

"Really?"

"But of course," she said and chuckled. "A guarantee of twenty engagements at a minimum with an honorarium of seven fifty."

"Well," said Lang, "that would depend on the subject matter. There are certain things I can speak about. Certain things I'm not competent to handle."

"Mr. Lang," she said, "you underestimate yourself. And you overestimate the audience. You have rare presence. You're a natural.

It wouldn't matter *what* you spoke about or whether you merely recited the multiplication table in Polish." She chuckled.

"Are you as lovely as your voice?" he said.

There was a pause. "Well," she finally said, "that's a matter of taste, isn't it? One man's meat, you know."

"I'm willing to discuss it," he said. "What do you want me to speak about?"

"The Menace of Communism."

"Oh, no," he said. "Not that. *Anything* but that!"

"Oh, *yes,*" she said. "It's the topic of the day, you know. And there's no one in sight who can handle it as well as you. I listened to you in court today."

"You did?" He laughed. "You know, Carol," he said, "I really don't believe there *is* such a thing as the menace of Communism."

"Francis," she said, "do you *have* to believe it?"

He laughed and she joined him. He said, "I'm a difficult client. I prefer to travel in my personal aircraft."

"How thrilling," she said. "Perhaps you'd take me for a ride, say to your first engagement . . . in Boston."

"Perhaps I would. But the seven fifty you mentioned wouldn't really meet my needs, Carol. I'm not only difficult but I'm expensive, too."

"How much would you require?"

"Twelve hundred."

"That's a bit steep."

"Aircraft are expensive to maintain if you want them to stay in the air, and I do," he said. "I do."

"I could probably go to eight, but no further."

"Let's compromise," he said. "I'm saving you all the expense of plane fares, a secretary and all that sort of baggage. Make it an even thousand."

"Make it nine hundred," she said.

"It's a deal. And a date with you for dinner, thrown in," said Lang.

"I'm entirely at your disposal," the low voice said with a touch of humor. "Shall we say tomorrow at five, at my office?"

He hung up and let out a wild, "Yippee!" *One man's meat.* He laughed till tears came to his eyes, and then he said solemnly, "Monsignor, *me cago en la leche de la Virgen Puta!*"

9

When the Allied forces landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944, Ben knew he would never get into action. He had been at Fort Bragg for six months, endlessly training other replacements in squad and platoon tactics.

On his arrival in January of that year he had said to himself, looking in the latrine mirror, "Hurray, I'm a soldier. I have a rifle. I'm a fighting man." That was six months ago.

And all of 1943 had been spent in the worst sort of frustration. His request to Colonel Wilson had resulted in a transfer all right, a transfer to a military hospital in Butler, Pennsylvania.

There Sergeant Blau was put to work mopping floors, polishing brass, emptying bedpans, scrubbing the tiled diet kitchen, carrying out and burning soiled bandages and other trash.

Meantime, the war was being won in Eastern Europe and the Western democracies were stalling the second front in every way they could. Promised in 1942, the anniversary of the Soviet Revolution was celebrated on November 7 by an Allied invasion of French North Africa. And Vice-President Wallace stood up in Madison Square Garden in New York and said the second front had been opened in the best possible way.

The vast audience had greeted the announcement with something less than an ovation, for North Africa was a long way from the only *place d'armes* where the Nazis could possibly be defeated: Western Europe. Hadn't Bismarck and even Hitler himself said, "We are lost if we must fight on two fronts!"

Sicily followed in July of 1943, a year ago, Italy in September and Rome itself was taken two days before the first paratroops dropped on Normandy. The fighting in France was now at its height and with the Red Army advancing from the East and the others from the West, it was only a question of time before victory would be in the bag.

Ben knew by now that what had happened to him had happened to many other Lincoln men. The vets' office had made official protest about the way Spanish veterans, anxious to offer their services in the war, had been given the run-around. Man after man had been recommended for OCS, gone through the course with the highest grades and then been sent back to his original outfit without a commission.

Drew Pearson had written two columns about it a year ago, Ben remembered. *Today in the State Department,* he wrote, *many*

of the reactionaries will admit they made a tragic mistake in boycotting the Spanish Loyalist Government...

Even more important, many diplomats now believe that had the dictators been crushed in their practice war in Spain . . . the present war might never have happened.

He went on to detail the treatment the VALB men were getting in the Army of the United States and threw in the faces of the reactionaries the story of Herman Bottcher.

Those few Spanish war veterans who have been given a chance, have used their previous fighting experience to great advantage. Captain Herman Bottcher, called the Sergeant York of the Pacific, rose from sergeant to captain, has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart with Clusters ...

He wrote of Johnny Gates, who had gone from Lieutenant Colonel in Spain to private in the AUS; of Irv Fajans, who was also yanked out of OCS a day before he was to receive his commission, of others. There was a policy involved, Ben felt, and it could be described in two letters he had seen before: *S.D.*

Nevertheless, he had applied himself to mopping the floors and polishing the brass assiduously. He was pleasant to all the medics, nurses and the doctors. He continued to study infantry strategy and tactics and got a chess tournament going.

Ben was soon put in the office to handle records. Maybe they discovered I can work a typewriter better than a mop, he thought, but even with records in filing cabinets, it is possible to exercise some imagination and initiative if there's an incentive.

So he started to make a private statistical survey of the patients whose records were on file and broke down the reasons for their disabilities into various major classifications—so many GU cases, so many influenza, so many service-connected injuries, so many wounded in action, so many cases of combat fatigue.

It was obvious immediately that the combat fatigue cases—the term was later changed to psychoneurosis—bulked large in the total of admissions. In fact, they constituted a good thirty percent of the whole, and Ben was profoundly shocked by this fact.

Obviously they aren't teaching the boys anything, he decided, and he took the opportunity one day to talk to one of the ranking doctors about it. The Lieutenant Colonel wasn't impressed.

"Modern war," he said, as though that settled something.

"We had nothing like this percentage in Spain," said Ben and Colonel Stein looked up for the first time.

"What was the percentage?"

"I don't remember more than two or three men who folded up in the ten months I spent in action."

"How do you account for that, sergeant?" said Stein.

"Well, for one, we were all volunteers, which would argue for a rather high level of understanding, and I think it's understanding of the issues itself that's the crucial factor."

"Men don't go into action with issues in mind."

"Of course not, sir," said Ben. "But conviction seems to have a carry-over value even in the tightest spots. I know it was that way with me."

"We have orientation courses," Colonel Stein said and waved one arm. "Sit down, sergeant."

"Thank you, sir," said Ben. "That's true. I've attended them. Most of them stink."

"Why?"

"They're taught by men who don't know what fascism is in the first place, or if they do, don't think of it as anything special."

"What do *you* think of it?"

"I hate it," said Ben. "Personally and impersonally. I've made a study of it. I've seen it in action since I first learned about it in books."

Stein glanced sharply at Ben and said, "You and I are Jews. It may be more personal to us than it is to others."

"That could be, sir," said Ben. "But it could be just as personal to every working man—and there are millions—to every Protestant and every Catholic whose religion has been attacked by the Nazis, to every woman who's regarded as an inferior animal good only for *Kirche, Küche und Kinder;* to every Negro or minority group. It's the most viciously anti-human movement that has ever arisen."

"How'd you like to give a talk on this to the staff?"

Ben sighed. "This is where I came in," he said and grinned.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've been trying to get into action since December 8, 1941. The first camp I was in I was asked to give a talk. I gave three. And I'm in a general hospital now—two years later—as a filing clerk."

"I'll recommend you for a transfer," said Stein, "though I have an idea you could be very useful to me here."

"Thank you, sir," said Ben. "I'll believe it when I see it." And he sent up to Colonel Stein a study published earlier that year by the Yale Institute of Human Relations. It was titled *Fear in Battle,* and was based on questionnaires filled out by three hundred veterans of the Lincoln Battalion.

Three months later he reported to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and after six months, the war was rolling over his head in Europe and the Pacific. He led his men on maneuvers. A division was

being built up, and the shit-house rumors flew thick and fast. It would be sent to Iceland; it would be sent to the ETO, to the CBI; it would stay here and rot forever.

The stage was shrewdly set to simulate actual combat conditions and a passing grade meant you had come out the other end "alive." The officer-umpires kept the score. It was fun.

Crossing a fence, they were sniped at. Moving through wooded terrain, a hidden machine-gun opened up on them. There were sudden "gas" attacks, or at an empty shed in the woods, a door suddenly opened and an enemy soldier lunged with a bayonet.

Then they went out on the combat range for maneuvers on company, battalion, regimental and division scale. Skirmish lines were formed and advanced. They infiltrated and fired with live ammunition at silhouette targets that suddenly popped up before them. Live ammunition streaked over their heads—fire and movement—and the score was kept again by officer observers.

Ben got bored going to the USO where girls advertising Lucky Strikes or Chesterfields made feeble, antiseptic hip-movements intended to stimulate the men without provoking them. He had seen "Sergeant York" three times in three years and was tired of the guys on the rifle range licking their thumbs and wetting the front sight of the Garand (like Gary Cooper) and announcing in phony (or authentic) hillbilly accents, "Hit cuts down the haze."

But he had good company in Hank Pratt, the authentic Virginia hillbilly who had turned up from Wheeler together with Costa, the Puerto Rican, and they became a sort of Three Musketeers combination.

Pratt was one of the funniest guys Ben had ever met and reminded him of a Tennessee counterpart he had known in Spain, called Kincaid. Nobody knew how Kincaid had ever got to Spain, or why, but Kincaid knew that he intended to come out alive, and he deserted every chance he got.

Each time Kincaid fucked off he was caught and brought back and Busch called him on the carpet and bawled the living Jesus out of him. And Kincaid merely stood there, his head hanging, and said, "You're sho' right, Cap'n, sir. Ah'm no good. You ought t' shoot me. Why don' you shoot me, cap'n, an' git it over with?"

Pratt talked exactly the way Kincaid had talked.

"You're gonna stay right here an' simply fade away, Ben," he said.

"Looks that way, Hank."

"Sho' are," said Hank. "Counta bein' a book-reader, I say. Man

that reads so many books, he don' set right with the brass." He started to laugh, exposing his nearly toothless gums. "Remin' me some time, Ben," he said, "t' tell you 'bout the time my pappy give our neighbor Burt a soap-enema."

"I'll remind you," said Ben. "But what made you think of it just now?"

"Dunno," said Pratt. "Less'n it's that I don' know any other man in this man's army's taken as much shit as you."

10

July 28, 1948

"I will ask you now," said Tabatchnik, "why you gave up your well-paid position as a foreign correspondent and joined the Abraham Lincoln Battalion."

Ben was in the witness chair, but he could not manage to keep his eyes off Sue Menken, who was sitting in the first row of spectators. What's she done, he wondered, quit her job? How could she afford to?

"I had been in Spain six months," he replied. "I had seen the fighting on all fronts, but most particularly I had seen what was happening to the civilian population."

He paused and looked at the jury. (I could talk about this for hours, he thought. How in the world can I condense it so that it will mean something to them?)

"I witnessed a calculated policy of atrocity, the deliberate bombing of old men, women and small children. Their bodies lay on the streets of the Spanish cities, their blood ran in the gutters. Those who were alive were starving—literally."

The jurymen and women were watching him. Their faces were impassive. Nothing could be told by looking at them. One of them was chewing gum in a mechanical fashion as though his jaws were a machine that could continue to move forever.

"The country was blockaded by the very nations that should have helped it. The courage of the people was amazing; their determination was unbelievable. They did not cringe in fear, they were angry. They supported their government. This was the most obvious thing about the entire situation.

"As a correspondent I had access to diplomats and statesmen not

only of the Spanish Republic itself but also of the many countries represented there. In their overwhelming majority these foreign statesmen supported Franco. They considered the Spanish people so much rabble."

Ben paused and caught a glimpse of the prosecutor's face. It was smiling cynically. It was the sort of face he was talking about at that very moment.

"They regarded people with money as the only people of consequence: people with standing in society, people they called 'the better sort,' people who were cultured and well-bred. They were that sort of people themselves. That the ordinary people of Spain were fighting for food, for decency, for a chance to emerge from the Middle Ages they could not respect. They hated and despised them. This angered *me.*"

Ben paused so long that Tabatchnik said, "You joined the International Brigade... when was that?"

"In April 1938."

"Was the government winning at the time?"

"It was losing; Spain had almost been cut in half by the Franco armies."

"Do you know any other correspondent who followed your example?"

"I met one. James Lardner."

"He was the son of Ring Lardner, the famous writer?"

Billings stood up. "I object, your Honor. Mr. Lardner's parentage is quite irrelevant, it seems to me."

"Sustained."

"What happened to James Lardner?" said Tabatchnik.

"He was killed in action."

"You didn't feel that what was happening in Spain was, after all none of your business?"

"Definitely not. Any more than Kosciusko, Pulaski and von Steuben felt the American Revolution was none of their business. Any more than Lafayette himself," said Ben with a smile. "Though I scarcely equate myself with these men."

"Were you a Communist Party member before you went to Spain?"

"I was not."

"When did you join the party?"

"Shortly after my return, in January 1939."

"Did you know many members of your battalion who were Communists?"

"I met many who said they were."

"Were they ordered to go to Spain by the party?"

"Objection," said Billings. "This is hearsay."

"I will rephrase the question," said Tabatchnik. "Did they tell you how they happened to come to Spain?"

"Many of them did. Many of them..."

"Same objection," said Billings.

"Sustained."

"Do you know how they got there?" said Tabatchnik.

"It was common knowledge," said Ben, "that many paid their way and others had their passage paid out of funds raised for that purpose."

"Do you know who raised these funds?"

"I recall advertisements in various publications in 1937," said Ben, "by an organization that called itself the Committee for Technical Aid to Spain."

"So far as you know, Ben, these men—who were Communists before they came to Spain—were not ordered to go there by the party, is that correct?"

"So far as I know."

"Objection," said Billings. "Since the defendent *swears* he was not a Communist before he went to Spain he could have no knowledge of how Communists got to Spain."

"He said, so far as he knows," said Tabatchnik.

Billings smiled. "I will withdraw the objection," he said. The smile became a sneer beamed at the jury as the government attorney sat down. He had decided that the more Blau said, the better.

"How do you account for the fact that Mr. Funston, a former member of the Lincoln Battalion, testified the way he did?" said Sam.

"The only way I've ever been able to account for renegades," said Ben, "is that they've found it more profitable to lie than to tell the truth."

Billings said hotly, "Your Honor, I object to the question and move the answer be stricken as incompetent, irrelevant and immaterial."

"It will be stricken," said Judge Einhorn.

"Can you tell the jury, Ben, why you became a member of the Communist Party on your return from Spain?"

"I can," said Ben and paused, passed his hand over his face. He saw Sue smiling at him and he thought, I can't ramble on. I can't take too much time.

"A person becomes a Communist for many reasons," he said. "But whatever they are, they all relate to his entire life-experience.

The act of becoming a member is, in a sense, the culmination of a long process.

"I don't want to bore the ladies and gentlemen of the jury with my life story. But I must say this: I was the child of fairly well-to-do parents. I never really suffered deprivation—till *after* I came home from Spain.

"That was when I found that I could no longer be employed by any large commercial newspaper. That was when I began to experience in my own person what millions throughout the world have experienced for centuries: hunger.

"Like most people I had become aware of the poverty which is apparently the lot of the majority of the people on earth. This never made any sense to me but I tried to understand it. I examined many theories—political, philosophical, psychological and economic—which attempted to explain this idiotic situation: that the earth was abundant and could produce enough for all, but all did not share of the abundance of the earth."

Ben saw Billings shift in his chair and make elaborate motions indicating boredom and impatience. He continued. "I suffered deeply when my father committed suicide because he could not make a million dollars in the stock-market and had lost all the money he possessed. I had covered the depression as a newspaperman from 1933 to 1936 and had experienced it to a certain extent in 1931 and 1932..."

"Your Honor," said Billings, rising wearily, "I must object to this long political tirade, the type of speech we always hear from people like the defendant, which is intended to utilize the courtroom as a forum for their subversive and un-American propaganda."

"I think it is permissible direct examination, Mr. Billings," Einhorn said mildly. "I will permit it. And I will also permit full cross-examination on it."

"I'm not going into questions of political economy or even history," Ben resumed. "I would merely like to tell a story which I think will explain why I felt that I had to join the party."

He looked at Sue and saw her watching him intently, her dark eyes larger than he had ever seen them. He smiled faintly at her and directed what he had to say to her.

"Most human beings, it seems to me, search for love their entire lives. Some of them find it, most of them do not. In our society love is a difficult thing to achieve. There is competition of the most vicious kind between man and man, between man and woman.

"Men make use of women in our society, and women make use of men. This seems to be a natural outgrowth of our form of economy,

which places a premium on what it calls success rather than co-operative effort among people.

"The Spanish Republic was not moving toward socialism. The Spanish people didn't want it. Not at all. But it was the *love* the Spanish people felt for each other and demonstrated toward me, personally, and toward the other men of the International Brigades who had come to fight for them—this is what made a Communist of me.

"This may seem strange, but it can be explained very simply. Those who had sat on the backs of the Spanish people for centuries, who sucked their blood, were gone. They fled to Franco's part of Spain or to France in 1936. They were the landlords, the industrialists, the bankers, the army brass and the hierarchy of the Church. They abandoned the Spanish people—to themselves.

"And the Spanish people were running things. They ran the factories, they ran the farms and mines and mills and orchards, the hotels and the streetcars, the banks and schools and libraries.

"And out of this radical change in their relationship to the wealth of their nation—temporary 'ownership' for only three years—there arose a revolutionary change in their relationships to each other.

"When the owners of the Spanish people abandoned them and they owned themselves, they began to put into practice what the Lord said to Moses in Leviticus: 'Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'..."

Ben turned now to the jury and said, "There was a time when I was ill for two weeks and I was fortunate enough to spend those two weeks in the home of some Spanish peasants in a small town.

"These people did not have enough to eat. They worked in the fields from before dawn till long after sunset. They were an old man and his old wife; a young woman whose husband was in an army hospital and two small children.

"These children had never seen a toy in their entire lives. They made them out of sticks and stones and pinecones. There was one bed in that house. It belonged to the old couple. They insisted that I sleep in it while they slept on the dirt floor. They shared their food with me, such as it was.

"Yet there was never a day when I did not find a present in my room when I woke up: a glass of wine, a handful of hazel-nuts, a bowl of dried figs, a flower..."

"Your Honor," said Billings wearily, "I must object again to this heart-rending story, this Communist soap-opera. It is entirely irrelevant to the issue at bar."

"Overruled," said Judge Einhorn and Billings sat down.

"The old woman," said Ben, "massaged my limbs every night for an hour before I went to sleep with some old wives' remedy that smelled to high heaven. And when I left to return to my battalion they wept. They were Catalans. They lived in Catalonia, a province that has its own language which I could not understand."

Ben paused and passed his hand over his face. "That's all that I can say. I don't know whether I've made myself clear or not, but Spain was the climactic experience of my life. It changed me into a different sort of man, a different kind of human being.

"Communists will tell you that there is no longer any reason why one individual—or a small group of individuals—should own and control the wealth of the earth and, by that very ownership, force everyone else to work for their own enrichment.

"Communists therefore work for a form of society in which all who are willing to work will own the land, the factories and the natural resources together and hold them in common. The mere *absence* of the landlords and factory owners of Spain created a condition such as I have just described."

He turned back to look at Sue. "I want to live long enough to see—in my native land—such a relationship between human beings on the almost universal scale I saw it exist in Spain.

"I believe it will come to pass because I know that over a third of the earth today, such a society *has* been achieved, in which the people possess themselves and the wealth of their nations; in which no man profits by the sweat of another man's labor; in which no woman must be subordinated to a man for her livelihood; in which people of all skin-colors, all racial groups, naturally consider themselves equals... and partners in a common enterprise: the enrichment of human life. And in which there are no wars."

Tabatchnik stood at the counsel table and turned to Billings. "Your witness," he said.

Billings rose with a smile.

11

March 13, 1945

Southern France was something like Spain but eastern France was nothing like Spain at all, Ben thought. It was cold (well, it was March after all); it was gloomy and depressing (well, it was war, wasn't it?).

Hank Pratt had liberated a suckling pig and the pig was turning on an improvised skewer. The odor was unbearably delicious. The men of Ben's platoon would share this porker, no one else. Costa, the Puerto Rican, was with them, so the old Three Musketeers combination of Camp Wheeler, Georgia, had persisted into and across France.

The sun was going down and Ben was depressed. I wish I could keep a diary, he thought; a diary could share some of the thoughts I can't share with Hank and Emilio. But why should you have thoughts you can't share with your comrades? he wondered.

"Ben," said Hank, "there's a shit-house rumor right outta the horse's mouth that we're movin' tomorrow."

"I know," said Ben.

"What you think, pal?"

"I think we better eat this pig. Let tomorrow take care of itself."

Man's dearest possession is life, Ben was thinking; *and as it is given him to live but once, he must live so as to feel no torturing regrets for years without purpose...* Lenin used to quote that statement, Ben recalled and wondered whether Lenin had written it. It bore a sentiment they could have taught me back in P. S. 43, but they never did. How come? They could have said it was written by Anonymous, couldn't they, the guy who wrote so many fine quotations? And there was more:

...So live as not to be seared by the shame of a cowardly or trivial life; so live that dying he may say. 'All my life and all my strength I gave to the finest cause in all the world—the liberation of mankind.'

"What's eatin' on you, Perfesser?" said Hank. "You gotta face would stop a eight-day clock."

Ben looked up and grinned at Hank, who was carving up the suckling pig with his trench knife. "Gimme a pork chop," he replied.

"No crap," said Hank. "I'm worried about you. You wouldn' even go t' that cat-house back in the last town."

"He's worried about the Captain," said Emilio.

"He distastes me," said Ben, in Hank's own hillbilly idiom.

"Tambien," said Costa and Hank said, "Huh?"

The three men were silent for awhile and suddenly Ben heard himself saying, "Hank, what're you doing in Europe anyhow?"

Hank looked at him open-mouthed, his lips and chin covered with pork grease. "Damned if I know, Perfesser. My draft board done caught up t' me, that's how come."

"Don't you know?" said Ben with a smile.

"No. Mebbe you should tell me."

"You're engaged in the liberation of mankind," said Ben, deadpan.

Emilio laughed and Hank sat there with his mouth open for a moment, then chewed on a spare rib. Then he put it down and looked at Ben.

"I am?" he said.

"Don't you agree?" said Ben, turning to Emilio. Emilio nodded. He knew it was a joke, and he felt the joke was directed at Hank and he loved to play jokes on Hank.

"Claro," he said and Hank said, "I know what *that* means. I been around with you long enough t' un'erstand your dirty Spic."

That's what we're *supposed* to be doing, Ben was thinking, all of us who're going into action soon against the enemy, the eternal enemy. Only, after this particular enemy is licked, his friends will still remain to be taken care of and there are so many of them, so many places.

"Perfesser," said Hank, "sometimes I don't savvy you." He shook his head. "Man like you, read so many books, you shouldn' be here *at* all."

"Don't say that," said Emilio. "We gotta have Ben around. That Captain Winston's gonna fuck up the detail sure as hell."

"Oh, I don't know," said Ben. "He's probably OK."

"He's the south end of a northbound mule," said Hank.

Ben put on his deadpan again and said sternly, "I don't like to hear you talk about our leaders like that, Hank. You gotta show more respect for authority."

"You know what I think," said Hank, chewing. "I think the Cap'n's one of them Nayzis hisself, tha's what I think. He acts like. I seen 'm in the movies."

"Maybe you got something there," said Emilio. "He sure don't like us GI's."

"Ben," said Hank, "I *trus'* you. You wouldn' let nothin' happen t' Mamie Pratt's lil boy, would you?"

"Hank," said Ben, "I love you like my brother." He looked up and glanced at Emilio to include him in what he had just said.

"What outfit's he in?" said Hank.

"He's dead. Killed in an air-raid on Manila—with all his family."

Hank shook his head. "All the good guys're dead," he said.

"The hell they are," said Emilio, clapping Hank on the shoulder with a greasy hand. "The three of us is still kicking around, ain't we?"

Hank turned to Ben with a puzzled expression on his face. "What's this lib'ration o' mankind you was talkin' about, Perfesser?"

12

July 28, 1948

"Now, Mr. Blau," said Billings, "if I understood what you said under direct examination, you are a Communist and you're proud of it. Is that correct?"

"Correct," said Ben.

"You differentiate yourself, I take it, from these witnesses who refuse to state their opinions and hide behind the Constitution, don't you?"

"Well," said Ben, somewhat puzzled by the curve Billings had thrown. "In a way, I suppose."

"Do you or don't you?" the prosecutor said. "Mind you, I have a certain admiration for your frankness, but I'd like to know exactly how you stand in these matters."

Sitting on the stand, Ben caught Sue's eye again and smiled and said, "Mr. Billings, if you are complimenting me, I'll have to reject the compliment."

"What does that mean?" said Billings.

"Only this," said Ben with a bright smile. "I'm aware that your job in this trial is to send me to prison, and I intend to resist you in every way I can. Point two, I think your compliment was really designed to disarm the ladies and gentlemen of the jury and lastly, I can't agree that witnesses before Congressional committees are hiding behind the Constitution. I was taught that the Bill of Rights was the shield of the citizen and was expressly designed to protect him from the tyranny of government."

"Is it your opinion that the government is a tyranny?" Billings shouted, suddenly red in the face.

Tabatchnik came to his feet. "Is this cross-examination, your Honor?"

Einhorn leaned forward over the bench and said drily, "I think we can dispense with this exchange of compliments. Proceed with your examination, Mr. Billings, and ladies and gentlemen of the jury, please disregard the exchange."

"Very well, Mr. Blau," said Billings, dropping his voice. "There has been testimony in this trial to the effect that the Communist movement is an international conspiracy.

"It came from a member of your Brigade in Spain, from an accredited professor of history and from other ex-members of the organization to which you belong. Are you saying that this is not a fact?"

"Absolutely," said Ben.

"Communism is *not* an international conspiracy?"

"It's not any kind of a conspiracy," said Ben. "There are lots of international organizations, Mr. Billings."

"Suppose you name a few, sir, and we'll see how they equate with the Communist movement."

"The Masonic Order," said Ben. "The Roman Catholic Church; International Rotary; The Young Men's Christian Association; the Society of Friends—I doubt if you would call any of them conspiracies, Mr. Billings."

"In what way," said Billings, with heavy sarcasm, "do any of these respectable organizations you have named resemble—in *any* respect—the international Communist movement to which you're so proud to belong?"

"All of them are voluntary associations of like-minded people," said Ben. "All are organized on an international scale. All contain members who agree, in general, on certain basic objectives they would like to see attained."

"Do any of them advocate revolution?"

"That's a trick question," said Ben. "Neither does the socialist movement advocate revolution."

"Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin all seem to disagree with you," said Billings, "or have your own views superseded theirs?"

"I think I understand your question," Ben said carefully. "Most of the organizations I named, in one way or another act to preserve and bolster the status quo. The socialist movement frankly challenges it and says it should and will be replaced. That apparently constitutes the difference—in your mind—between a 'respectable' organization and a 'conspiracy.' You don't seem to have any objection to international capitalist organizations like Standard Oil or—"

"You're a very skillful propagandist, Mr. Blau," said Billings. "Are you attempting to utilize your propaganda to get out from under the charge—"

"Objection," said Sam. "Counsel is arguing with the witness."

"Sustained."

"Mr. Blau, suppose you tell us, what *is* propaganda?" said Billings.

Ben grinned. "It's become a dirty word, Mr. Billings, but actually it means nothing more than the attempt by one individual or group to persuade another individual or group that his own point of view is correct or persuade him to follow a particular course of action."

"That's all it means?"

"Nothing more," said Ben. "Do you play chess?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, Do you play chess?"

"What does chess have to do with the serious question before this court?"

"If I were to attempt to persuade you that you *should* play chess because it develops the logical faculties, that would be propaganda, too."

"I'm asking the questions," said Billings, angrily. "*You* are answering them."

"Excuse me," said Ben. "I was trying to illustrate my answer."

"In your direct testimony, sir," the attorney said, "you referred to the Committee for Technical Aid to Spain and said it raised funds to assist men to go to Spain. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Was this a Communist committee, Mr. Blau?"

"I never knew the composition of the committee," said Ben. "Though I do remember that its chairman was a prominent member of the American Legion."

"You said you joined the Communist Party on your return from Spain, did you not?"

"That's right."

"Suppose you had been *asked* to go to Spain by the party—presuming you had been a member before," said Billings. "Would you have gone?"

"Objection," said Tabatchnik. "This is a hypothetical question."

"Your Honor," said Ben, "if my attorney will withdraw his objection, I'd like to answer the question."

"I withdraw it," said Sam.

"I'd also like to explain my answer," said Ben.

"Go right ahead," Judge Einhorn said.

"First," said Ben, "the answer is yes, I would have gone. For the same reason I joined the Brigade without being asked: because I came to believe passionately in the justice of Spain's cause and wanted to lend it whatever support I could."

"In other words," said Billings, "you Communists willingly subject yourselves to the regimentation the party imposes."

"Objection," said Tabatchnik. Ben was laughing.

"Would you like to answer that question, too?" Einhorn said.

"If my attorney doesn't object."

"I will withdraw the objection," asid Sam.

"Mr. Billings' remark was a classic example of the sort of logic that exists among people who *don't* play chess," said Ben and immediately regretted the flip reply. It was the sort of thing he had also done before the committee.

Billings said slowly, "Are you making this personal attack on me,

sir, because you have no love for the government I have the honor to represent in this case brought against you?"

"I didn't intend to attack you," said Ben seriously. "I merely wanted to stress the fact that what I said did *not* lead to the conclusion you drew from it. But I *would* like to say something about regimentation. The 'regimentation' which exists in the party—and to which you object—is the same sort of regimentation that exists in a symphony orchestra."

"I don't understand," said Billings.

"Neither do I," said Judge Einhorn.

"The orchestra has agreed to play Brahms' First Symphony, let us say. It could very well be that the first violin doesn't feel like playing Brahms' First but would rather play Beethoven's Seventh.

"Now, either he agrees to play the Brahms with the others or he withdraws from the orchestra. He's certainly regimented in that respect."

"The illustration's absurd," said Billings. "What has this to do with revolution?"

"Nothing," said Ben. "I haven't said a word about revolution." (The spectators laughed and Judge Einhorn rapped his gavel and they immediately subsided.)

"I'm sorry," Ben said. "Perhaps I can best make my meaning clear by a story I heard this week (he turned to the judge), if it please the court?"

"Yes?" said the judge.

"I don't mean to be facetious, but I think this story will answer Mr. Billings' question about regimentation." (He turned to Billings who was standing in front of him, tapping his foot unconsciously.)

"It seems a lady went into a music store and asked for a new recording of 'Peter and the Wolf' by Sergei Prokofiev, the Soviet composer. The clerk said coldly, 'We don't handle Mr. Prokofiev. He's a Communist.'

"The lady seemed surprised and said, 'Well, I don't know anything about his politics, but I do know he writes beautiful music.' At which the clerk drew himself up and said, 'Madame, *you* could write beautiful music, too, if they held a pistol to your head.' "

The spectators burst into uproarious laughter and Judge Einhorn slammed his gavel on the bench. "I'll clear the courtroom immediately," he said "unless this demonstration ceases!"

When the courtroom was silent again Judge Einhorn looked at Billings, noted the time and said, "The court will be in recess until two o'clock this afternoon."

In the bar and grill on the Square Ben said, "What've you done, quit your job?"

"Two weeks ago," said Sue. "Didn't you notice?"

"What're you living on? The Committee to Defend Ben Blau?"

"Why not?" she said. "I raise money for it. Or at least I go to people Anne Lang scouts out for me."

"I'll go to the can, and you'll spend it on riotous living."

"Serve you right," she said.

He took her hand across the table just as the waiter came, and he didn't release it. "One dry martini," he said, nodding his head toward her.

"Why don't you have one?"

"I'm on the stand," he said. "What do you want me to do, hang myself?"

"On one martini?" She pulled her hand free and said, "The trouble with you, Ben, is that you have no vices. Don't drink, don't smoke, don't swear. You're too damned pure to live."

"I have one vice," he said, "that's eating me alive."

"Goody-goody gumdrop," she said, fluttering her enormously long lashes. "Heroin?"

"You," he said.

"You're merely suffering from a condition endemic to your sex," she said. "The French call it *les pantalons chauds.*"

Ben laughed. "I wish it were true," he said. "The remedy's always at hand."

"Really?" she said. "Who are *you* all of a sudden, Errol Flynn?"

He didn't smile. He said, "Sue, I'm asking you to marry me."

"I appreciate the compliment," she said, her face suddenly sad. "I can't accept."

"Why not?"

She was silent and he said, "Don't you think I'm serious?"

"Worse that that," she said. "I *know* you are." She said nothing more and he stared at her until she became uncomfortable. "I don't think we could make a go of it," she finally said.

"Why not?"

"I don't know you. When you were merely accepting part of me, I understood you thoroughly and I sympathized with you, in a way. Now you seem much stronger."

He sat back in his chair and said, "This is a reason to refuse?" His astonishment was obvious.

"I don't know how to make it any clearer."

"I've been struggling for integration for years," he said. "I was two men much too long. That's why Ellen and I couldn't make it

work. I was still in pieces all through the war, but I'm beginning to mend."

"That's what I said."

"What's wrong with it?" he said as the waiter brought her cocktail. "Tell me now before you don't know which end you're sitting on."

She reverted to the old game and said, "*You* may feel that way after one martini, but you forget you're talking to an advanced alcoholic."

He ignored the crack and reached for her hand again and she let him have it. "You've done a wonderful job for the committee," he said.

"I can't follow you," Sue said, "That's an example of what I mean. You go so fast in so many directions at the same time. *I* haven't done anything for the committee. The vets have done the job; the *Daily's* done the job; the party's done it. It may sound silly, but as hard as I've tried to be an intellectual, I'm simply a working girl and that's what I'll always be."

"Now I don't understand *you,*" he said.

"You're quicksilver," she said. "You're in pieces one minute, then you come together in one lovely, shining ball."

"A lousy image," he said.

"You're wonderful on the stand. You're in one piece. But you frighten me. I need a simple man; not two men. You're half a dozen. Part of you yearns for the fleshpots, à la Francis Lang; the best part of you is solid, down to earth and belongs to us."

"I should hope so."

"Can you give me a guarantee?" she said with a smile.

"Sure," he said. "I'm not likely to go back to the fleshpots. No money. I'm not going to chuck it all and be a Great Writer. I'm in this for the duration, wherever it leads. That means a guarantee of *no* security as a man, as a husband, as the father of your children. How do you like it?"

"I'm beginning to understand you again," she said.

"What about it?" he said, mock-ferocious. "Take it or leave it!"

"You're *so* romantic, Ben the Blue," she said with a smile that gave him the answer he was waiting for.

On the way back to the courthouse the newsboys were calling an extra but they were looking at each other in an idiotic fashion and did not hear what they were shouting. . .

Billings was positively grim as he opened up.

"I would ask your Honor," he said, "to instruct the defendant to

save his little jokes for the articles he's writing for *The Daily Worker.*"

Judge Einhorn said, "After all, Mr. Billings, you invited the defendant to illustrate his answer to your question about regimentation."

Billings flushed and said, "Now, Mr. Blau. You have testified that before you went to Spain you were not a member of the Communist Party. That's correct?"

"I joined in 1939," said Ben. "Correct."

"Were there members of the Communist Party in the Brigade?"

"I have so testified," said Ben. "And so have other witnesses for the defense."

"When you were a soldier in the Army of the United States, were you also a Communist Party member?"

"No. The party felt that its members should not retain their affiliation while serving in the armed forces."

"And you promptly obeyed the party's order?"

"I agreed with the party. It was not an order. If the party had felt I *should* retain my membership, you would say that was proof of conspiracy."

"Mr. Defendant," said Billings, "do you realize the fact that I am conducting this examination, not you?"

"The defendant will confine his remarks to answering the questions, and not make gratuitous statements," said the judge.

"If it please the court," said Tabatchnik, "I submit that Mr. Blau's remark was intended to clarify his answer."

"I can't agree with you, counsel," said Einhorn.

"Why did the party feel and why did you agree that you should not retain your affiliation while you were in the army?"

"Because the party—and I might say, Mr. Billings, that my party, unlike the capitalist parties, *is* its membership, not a group of big shots in a smoke-filled room who hand down orders—because the party wholeheartedly supported the war and didn't want any opportunity to arise for factionalism within the ranks of the army. The Spanish party, incidentally, had felt the same way."

"As a matter of fact," said Billings, "weren't you Communists ordered to drop your membership when you were inducted, in order to better conceal that membership?"

"The answer is no," said Ben. And he added, "You must have a low opinion of Army Intelligence, Mr. Billings. G2 knew everything about me there was to know. And I was kicked around in the army for three years before I managed to get into combat."

"You were anxious to get into combat?" Billings said with a sneer.

"Certainly," said Ben. "Unlike many people I could mention, I *really* supported the war."

Billings dropped this line of questioning, realizing that it would lead him to Ben's actual service and the medal he had won for extraordinary heroism, which Tabatchnik had already exploited in direct examination. He had a distinct feeling that, as of the moment, the jury was with Ben and not with the government.

"Mr. Blau, would you say that in general you agree with the policies and the program of the Communist Party as presently constituted?"

"That's a blanket question," Ben said before Tabatchnik had a chance to object, "but the answer would be yes."

"You have no fundamental disagreement with it?"

"I have had in the past. At the present I don't."

"What disagreements did you have in the past?"

"When I was in the Army, and not a member," said Ben, "I objected violently to the dissolution of the party. Had I been a member I would have argued against it and voted against it. That was in 1944. But the error was corrected in 1945."

"Precisely," said Billings, and Ben wondered what he meant by that. "So today, you have no disagreements with it?"

"No fundamental disagreements."

"Then," said Billings, walking to the counsel table and picking up a folded newspaper, "you agree with the principles and practices—" He unfolded the newspaper and displayed its front page in such a way that both Ben and the jury could see it—"*of these people who were arrested today by the government of the United States!*"

The scare-head read:

U. S. INDICTS TOP RED LEADERS!
Communist Party Chiefs Held For 'Conspiracy to Teach Violent Overthrow' of U.S. Government!

"What?" said Ben, puzzled.

Tabatchnik rose and said, "Your Honor, I demand a mistrial. Mr. Billings has injected matter which is entirely prejudicial and inflammatory." (What *is* this? Ben was thinking. I didn't see that. We didn't see a paper when we came back from lunch. I'll be damned.)

"I don't think there's any need to argue the point," said Judge Einhorn. "I will sustain your objection, Mr. Tabatchnik, if you make one." He turned to the jury box.

"This morning, ladies and gentlemen, indictments were issued charging certain leaders of the Communist Party with conspiracy

to teach and advocate the violent overthrow of the government. I will direct the jurors now that they are to ignore Mr. Billings' question and give no weight in their ultimate deliberations to this extraneous case. It is not related in any way to the charge on which this defendant is being tried. The question will be stricken and defense counsel's motion for a mistrial will be denied."

"I cite as error your Honor's remarks and instructions," said Tabatchnik. "It's beyond my comprehension how the ladies and gentlemen of the jury will be able to erase this incident from their minds and not permit it to influence them. After all, this case will be in the headlines for weeks and the defendant has admitted to being a member of the Communist Party."

"Proceed," said Judge Einhorn. "And I would like to see this case move a little more rapidly. It seems to me that both sides have dallied unnecessarily over matters that are really extraneous to the case at bar."

"Mr. Blau," said Billings, his lips tight, "you have testified that there were Communists in the Lincoln Battalion—men who told you they were members of that party."

"That's correct."

"I will ask you now, who were these Communists?"

"Objection," said Sam.

"Overruled," said Einhorn. "In its effort to determine the extent of Communist influence in the International Brigades, I believe the government is entitled to an answer to this question."

"I cannot answer the question," said Ben.

"Was Major Busch a Communist?" said Billings.

"That is not for me to say."

"Was Joe Faber, who gave Mr. Lang the notebook, a Communist?"

"I would like to make it clear," said Ben, addressing the judge, "that I have taken the witness stand because I want to defend myself and to submit my personal opinions and actions to the ladies and gentlemen of the jury. I cannot testify about other people who are not parties to this case."

"Mr. Blau," said Judge Einhorn. "Perhaps I should make your position clear to you. When you took the stand, you assumed the obligation of answering truthfully all pertinent questions put to you by counsel for both sides. I have just ruled that Mr. Billings' question was pertinent and proper."

"I ask your Honor to direct the witness to answer," said Billings.

"I'm not a stoolpigeon," said Ben.

Billings said, "A stoolpigeon, Mr. Blau, is generally a *criminal* who assists the forces of law and order in apprehending other

criminals. Nobody ever informs on the Boy Scouts of America!"

"I have a different definition," said Ben.

"Surely there's nothing criminal about your membership in the Communist Party, is there?"

"Nothing whatsoever," Ben said vehemently.

"You don't consider the party a criminal conspiracy, you have testified."

"That is true."

"You've said you are proud of your membership. Are other Communists ashamed of theirs?"

"Your Honor," said Sam, "I object to this entire line of questioning. It is irrelevant, prejudicial and inflammatory."

"Overruled. I will direct the witness to answer."

"Your Honor," said Ben, "I can only speak for myself. It seems to me profoundly dishonorable and un-American to name other people who may very easily—especially in view of this new development, about which I've just learned—people who may be subject to harassment, loss of employment and public contempt, or even prosecution."

"What's dishonorable about assisting the forces of law and order?" said Billings.

"I said I didn't accept your definition of a stoolpigeon," Ben said hotly.

"Mr. Blau," said Judge Einhorn, "I must remind you that I directed you to answer. I can appreciate your distaste in naming people who may turn out to be wholly innocent of any wrong-doing, but I shall be obliged to hold you in contempt of court unless you answer."

"I'm sorry," said Ben, after a pause. "I don't wish to be in contempt of court, but even less do I wish to violate what seems to me a fundamental American principle, which every child learns when he's very small—not to snitch on other people in order to spare himself."

"You're refusing to answer?" said Billings.

"I'm refusing."

"Mr. Blau," said Judge Einhorn, "I will give you one more opportunity to answer. Otherwise I shall hold you in contempt of court."

Ben looked out at the spectators and saw Anne Lang, her face tight and strained, and Sue Menken in the front row. Sue's eyes were enormous but she was holding one hand above the level of the railing, her index finger and thumb forming a perfect circle.

His guts were tight as though he were going into action any minute and he took a deep breath.

"I'm proud of my membership in the party," he said slowly, "and there hasn't been a day in the last nine years that I haven't questioned myself and what I've learned to test whether or not what I believe is true.

"I have no desire to be a martyr or to put on a theatrical performance. Nor do I believe there's a party member in the nation who's not as proud of his affiliation as I am.

"Unfortunately, at this moment, it's not only unpopular to be a Communist, it's downright dangerous. If a great hue and cry had not been raised, if the Big Lie of Hitler had not been imported to my own country, I'm sure there wouldn't be a Communist in the land who wouldn't be as proud as I am to proclaim himself . . ."

"Your Honor," said Billings, "I object to this man turning the courtroom into a forum for his insidious propaganda."

"I will permit him to finish," said Einhorn.

"Thank you, your Honor. I'll try to be brief. Unfortunately, as I said before, the Big Lie *has* been imported and it has been given wide circulation and it is widely accepted.

'I will say categorically that the allegation that there is such a thing as a world-wide Communist conspiracy is the most cynical hoax that has ever been perpetrated on men and women of good will.

"Hitler destroyed Spain and murdered millions of human beings with this lie, and he very nearly conquered the entire world before he was stopped.

"For myself, and for my own reasons, I've answered the so-called Sixty-Four Dollar Question. But it seems to me that the question is more than, 'Are you now or have you ever been?'

"It's much more than the right all Americans possess to belong to any organization, associate with any person or group, speak or write or publish any idea that may come into their heads.

"It's become a question of love or hatred. It's become the unresolved question of democracy or fascism—in our own country, here, now, today.

"To my mind, it's the unsolved equation between world war and world peace. It is now a question of life or death. And it is in this sense and for these reasons that I say I will not put the finger on any of my comrades, who are as innocent of any offense against the American people as I am myself."

"Mr. Blau," said Judge Einhorn, "I find you in contempt of court and I remand you to the custody of the United States Marshal, who is directed to hold you in prison, except during such hours as this court is sitting, until the conclusion of the trial, at

which time I may see fit to impose a further penalty for what seems to me deliberate contumacy and flagrant contempt."

He rose and the bailiff cried, "This Court is now in recess," and the marshal came to Ben and fastened the cuff around one wrist.

Ben looked out at the spectators and saw Sue and smiled at her. There were tears in her eyes, and there was an ironical smile on her face, too.

13

18 *March* 1945

Ben's division went into action across the Rhine on 15 March, but he had been uneasy about his company commander, Captain Bryce Winston II, ever since he had taken over in France.

There had been a general shift in the tables of organization, with Winston, an OCS product with no combat experience, being elevated from First Lieutenant to Captain and the company commander, Harrington, receiving his majority and command of the battalion.

Captain Winston was not only a product of OCS but also of Harvard and he wore the crew cut. He managed to keep his uniform spotless all the way across France till they crossed the river, then specks of dust began to appear on his boots and occasional wine stains on his combat jacket.

Ben was a temporary platoon leader, having replaced Lieutenant Smythe, who was in hospital. He kept constant liaison with the Captain and watched him uneasily. The man carried his books into action with him and no doubt would apply the "school solution" to anything that happened.

Guys who felt that, what with the Bulge straightened out at the end of January and the Nazis on the run, this would be nothing but a mopping-up operation, were off their base, Ben figured. The dying beast would be desperate, and hadn't Hitler himself promised that if he went down, he would pull all of Europe down with him? (It was on its knees already.)

The enemy's country, Ben felt, was dank and dismal like the bastards' souls, and the neat little houses with their meticulous little kitchen gardens only served to heighten the impression.

Look at the difference, Ben thought, between the Germans under Nazism and the Germans of the Thaelmann Battalion in Spain.

The orderliness and precision were present in both instances. The Thaelmann bivouac areas during rest periods were models of organization and design, even to flower beds being planted and sedulously cultivated.

But the men of the Thaelmann were flaming anti-fascists and the love they bore each other and their Spanish comrades was in diametrical opposition to the hatred and contempt with which the Germans under Hitler had been conditioned to regard the "inferior races" of Europe, Asia and the Western Hemisphere.

The German countryside had been as quiet as the grave for two days when the fireworks started. The division was moving in extended order, supported by tanks, and had theoretically dug in for the night. Winston had his command-post in a gardener's cottage and his orderly had made it neat and clean. There was even a red and white checkered tablecloth on the dining table when Ben reported for his platoon and to get his orders for the night.

At his suggestion the Captain had accepted Hank Pratt and Emilio Costa as squadleaders under Ben and put them in for their corporal's stripes. Winston was half crocked at the moment.

"This is a push-over," he said to Ben. "Whatta you think, sergeant?"

"So far so good," said Ben. "But I'd suggest posting extra guards tonight."

"Anything you say, sergeant," said Winston, clapping him on the shoulder. "Have a drink. This," he said, introducing the bottle on his table as though it were another guest, "is Chateauneuf du Pape, one of the best wines of France, and a vintage year at that."

"Thanks," said Ben, accepting a glass. He lifted it and said, "Death to fascism."

"*Zum Faschismus, Tod!*" said Winston. "I'm going to hit the sack. Call me if anything pops."

Ben posted his guards around the company perimeter, doubling them. He inspected all the posts twice before midnight, and he had just rolled into his blanket near Costa and Pratt when it started.

Immediately everything was confused, with the suddenly awakened men firing in all directions and wild shouting and running all over the place. Ben leaped to his feet and scoured around the platoon area, forming a skirmish line. The enemy was using mortars and machine guns and the cry of "Medic! medic!" was heard on all sides. Most of the men, Ben realized, were as green as Captain Winston.

He sent Hank Pratt back to the company CP to inform the commanding officer of what was happening and ordered his men

to hold their fire till he could figure out what was happening himself.

The firing died down suddenly, but everyone was awake for the rest of the night. Ben ordered his men to dig in, set up his machine guns and mortars and sent Costa out with a couple of other guys to act as forward observers and report back. He didn't hear from them again till morning.

Captain Winston appeared in the first platoon's area, looking fuzzy as hell. "Nothing but a flurry," he said. His eyes were wide, and he had a canteen slung on his belt from which he took a slug. He offered it to Ben. Ben shook his head.

"Something tells me we're overextended," Ben said. "Maybe we should pull back a bit and consolidate this position."

"Ridiculous," said Winston. "We're covered on both flanks by Baker and Charley companies and I'm in contact. Nothing's happening. Hold your water."

Ben walked him back to the hut and took a look at the map, with his permission. The CP was on the back side of a wooded knoll but the company was pushed forward in a triangular salient to the east. If Baker and Charley weren't on their toes, they were a pushover for flank attacks that could pinch them off.

He pointed this out to Winston, who kissed it off and even made a nasty comment about an experienced soldier going chicken all of a sudden. Ben left and went back to the lines. He was pleased to see the men had dug in deep and were alert. He ordered up more ammo for the machine guns, the riflemen and the mortar squad. He had grenades brought up and distributed. Then he sat down with his back to a tree and tried to stay awake.

The whole company awoke just before dawn to fire from three sides. Costa came in and reported that the second platoon's lieutenant had been knocked off. The ground was still covered with haze and it was impossible to see a hundred yards. The mortars started dropping again and there were a number of casualties.

Ben put Hank in command of the platoon and acted as his own runner back to Winston. That Pratt, he had decided, was nothing like Kincaid, who was in Spain. He was a natural-born fighting man, if there was such an animal.

Winston was up and trying to shave. He had cut himself three times. "I'd order a withdrawal if I were you, sir," said Ben and Winston looked at him. His eyes were bloodshot and his hands were trembling.

If the guy weren't obviously overhung, Ben thought, I'd say he was bucking for Section Eight. Winston looked at Ben slack-jawed and said, "I'm in command here, sergeant."

"Yes, sir," said Ben. "What are your orders?"

"Order an attack," said Winston, who had decided not to finish the shave and was washing his face. Ben was amazed. Attack? Attack what? In which direction?

"There are at least three heavy machine guns facing us," he said, "not to mention the mortars. Crossfire. I wouldn't be surprised if there were some tanks coming up soon."

Winston glared at Ben, his lower lip trembling. "Take out the machine guns. We'll worry about the tanks when they arrive."

"Yes, sir," said Ben and raced off around the side of the hill.

He sent Costa with two squads infiltrating off to the left to try to reach the German gun on that flank. The haze was burning off. He had told Hank to take two squads off the right flank, and he ordered cover-fire from all the remaining rifles. If the flanking guns were taken out, the one in front might not be too hard to handle. He sent a runner to Winston to tell him what he'd done, to the two other platoons to ask for cover-fire and took his position in the center to await developments.

The German m.g. fire stepped up within a couple minutes and Ben had every rifle left in the three platoons covering the advancing squads. He noted that there was very little dead ground in front of any of the platoons and hoped the men were dug in deep enough to have decent protection.

The machine guns slacked off and the mortars picked up. The enemy was firing from a light growth of woods three hundred yards away that formed an arc around the triangular salient the company occupied.

The two machine guns spoke again, stepping up their fire, and in a few minutes an exhausted runner came to Ben and told him Costa's two squads had been practically wiped out but that they had silenced one gun. The Puerto Rican was dead, the runner said.

The same thing happened to Hank Pratt. He lost most of his men and silenced the gun himself with a pair of grenades after he had been cut down by enemy fire. "Last thing Hank did . . ." his runner panted, ". . . got hit bad and fell . . . picked himself up an' ran . . . slung one grenade an' got hit again . . . fell . . . raised up and slung the last one. Bullseye." Ben stared at the runner.

"Poor Hank," he said. "I loved that crazy goof."

"Me too," said Ben, thinking, *Wat's this lib'ration of mankind you was talkin' about, Perfesser?* When the runner had got his breath he sent him to Winston with a report that read: "Two enemy m.g.'s silenced; 16-20 men dead or wounded; Costa, Pratt killed. Gun at apex of triangle still in action. Await orders. Blau."

The enemy mortars were getting vicious. It would be no time before the two silent guns would be replaced. This might be the time for the advance Winston had ordered, though Ben still felt it would be a better idea to withdraw.

The runner came back wild-eyed. "Report . . . to the cap'n." he gasped and Ben looked at him. "What for?" The runner shook his head, said, "Think he's flipped his lid."

Ben gave the command to a corporal named Wiener and on his way back to the gardener's hut he was intercepted by another runner who told him the company's only other lieutenant had been hit and evacuated.

When he came into the hut Winston was seated at the table, his head buried in his arms. Ben shook his shoulder and Winston looked up. He was cold sober but the sour smell of alcohol hung around him like a fog.

"Report," said Winston, summoning up reserves of authority he did not possess.

"Both platoon lieutenants are out," said Ben. "Benner dead. Gizzi wounded. I sent a report by the runner. Did you get it?"

Winston nodded. "Did you attack?"

Apparently he hadn't read the report, so Ben repeated it. And he added, "We've had a number of casualties from mortar fire, which is still heavy. The machine gun in the center is still active."

"What should I do?" said Winston, looking hopelessly at Ben.

"What do you mean, sir?"

Winston sat erect, slammed his fist on the table and shouted, "I told you! I don't know *what* to do! You know what to do, you *do* it!"

Ben grabbed Winston's shoulder and shook him. 'Snap out of it, Captain," he said angrily. "You're in command of a company of men. Get the lead out!"

Winston was bawling, looking up at Ben with tears streaming down his face. "All those men lost," he said, sobs wracking his body. "All my men lost. It's *my* fault!"

You're damn tootin', Ben thought and watched as the Captain put his head down on the table again and refused to move, though Ben shook him repeatedly. Then he suddenly got up, ran to the cot in the corner of the room, threw himself on it and drew his knees up to his chest.

Ben picked up the phone and when battalion answered, he said, "Major Harrington, Blau of Able Company calling."

Harrington knew something had happened and his voice betrayed it. "What is it, Blau?" he said nervously.

"I've assumed command of the company, sir," he said. "Captain

Winston's ill. We've lost both lieutenants and perhaps twenty-five to thirty men in dead or wounded."

"What happened?"

"We're over-extended, sir, but we've managed to knock out two of three heavy machine guns on our flanks."

"Good," said Harrington. "Take out the third. I'll send up the reserve company to reinforce you within half an hour."

Ben hung up thinking, why not withdraw? They're not likely to follow us at this point. He walked slowly back to the lines, relieved Wiener and sent for Sergeant Malloy of the second platoon before he had made up his mind what to do.

But his mind had been made up before he began to think of it consciously, and when Malloy appeared he put him in command of the company and said, "When you hear that machine gun die, withdraw the company about five hundred yards."

"What you gonna do, Blau?"

Ben told him and Malloy, whose scapular was hanging out of his open shirt, said, "You're crazy."

"Mebbe so," said Ben, "but I'll be damned if I'll send out two more squads when one man can do it himself."

"Whatta ya wanta be, a hero?"

"No," said Ben. "I want to get rid of that gun, as ordered."

"To hell with the gun, you crazy loon," said Malloy. "Or I'll hafta report one dead Jew."

"Better a dead Jew than a dead Catholic," Ben said with a grin and Malloy pounded him on the shoulder and said, "I dunno about that, pal, dead Catholics are saved."

Ben saw Malloy cross himself as he moved forward with the extra grenades he had hooked on to his belt, his rifle slung across his shoulders.

There was a low stone wall that he could follow part of the way and the slight rise of ground before he reached the apex of the triangle was dotted with occasional heavy bushes.

Men dug in watched him with wide eyes as he infiltrated rapidly along the wall and even ran crouched where it was at its highest. The machine gun was going again and he had learned that more than forty men had been hit at the height of the fire fight.

What're you doing this for? he asked himself. Bucking for the commission you couldn't win back in the States? Nuts to that, his mind replied. Too many men have been hit because of that stupid bastard and you've got to stop it. If neither the Captain nor the Major knows when he's spread too thin and risking the whole damn company's being wiped out, then you have to take the responsibility for preventing it.

He had reached the point of the triangle and two guys in a slit-trench watched him as he took off the rifle and left it with them. "Take care of this," he said. "It's my best friend, like the Manual says."

He sprang out of the bush next to the slit-trench and ran crouched to the next, flopped. He got one grenade out of his belt and held it in his right hand. Then he got up and ran again.

When he reached the fourth bush, the machine gun had spotted him and he had spotted the gun. It was, as he had figured, in the dead center of the arc of light-growth trees. He could see its barrel. He rolled sideways to the next bush, down a small depression and up, then rose and ran for the next bush, dodging zig-zag.

Some riflemen flanking the Nazi machine gun had spotted him, too, and the earth spouted around him as he ran. How crazy can you get? his mind said, but he didn't answer it. He dropped for a long time behind the large bush while the rifle and m.g. bullets clipped off twigs over his head. He rested there, getting his breath until the firing stopped.

I can do it in two more laps, he figured, *if*. They expect you to play possum here, but they'll have you in their sights the minute you get up again. Use your head. A mortar shell suddenly landed right behind him and half-buried his legs. He didn't move but he knew he hadn't been hit. That was smart, he said to himself. The bastards know how to operate. He looked carefully around and saw that the ground sloped off to his left and there was some tall grass that could give cover. He began to edge sideways into the depression and was encouraged by the fact that the Germans apparently saw no movement, for they didn't open up.

He moved a good fifty feet to the left before he felt he could get up and run again. Then, instead of trying to make it in two laps his eyes decided for him that he could make it in one, so he ran zig-zag, pulling the pin out of the grenade and holding down the lever with his right hand as he fished in his belt for another grenade.

The machine gun opened up again but it was high. The riflemen were more accurate and the earth leaped on either side of him. His lungs were bursting but he knew that he couldn't stop now and he also knew that he was going to get hit any second.

He dropped to his knees and hurled the first grenade, transferred the second to his right hand, pulled the pin and flung it. Just before it landed he felt the blow in his thighs and rolled over onto his side. "It doesn't hurt," he said out loud. "It doesn't hurt."

He released another grenade from his belt, pulled the pin lying on his side, then raised up, took careful aim and let fly. He

shouted: *"Hay que matárlos! Hay que aplastárlos! Mueran los fascistas!"*

The second burst didn't hurt any more than the first but he was suddenly in the dark and heard voices shouting, shouting . . .

The second week in the base hospital Ben looked up from his bed and saw Francis X. Lang in a curious-looking uniform accompanying a small party of brass headed by nothing less than a one-star general. They marched in a body right up to his bed, and Ben saluted automatically.

The general pulled out a sheet of paper and read in a syrupy voice:

"On the morning of 18 March 1945, an Able Company rifle-platoon temporarily commanded by Sergeant Blau was caught in the open by grazing fire from a German machine-gun emplacement which was also inflicting casualties on the entire company.

"Showing no hesitancy and at the risk of his life, Sergeant Blau charged the gun emplacement single-handedly in a successful effort to destroy it although severely wounded himself.

"As a result of his heroic action, his men were afforded the needed time to secure cover. His undaunted courage in risking his life for the men of his rifle platoon reflects the highest credit upon Sergeant Blau and the military service."

The general saluted and his party saluted. Ben saluted. Francis Lang saluted. The General was handed a box by an aide and he pinned the Silver Star on Ben's pajama coat.

He was then handed a second, smaller box and he pinned a silver bar on the collar of the pajama jacket and said, "Lieutenant Blau, my congratulations." He saluted. Ben saluted. The General's party saluted and Lang saluted.

After some desultory conversation, the General and his party left and Francis Lang stood grinning at him.

"Fancy meeting you here," said Zav, and Ben noticed that he was slightly crocked. It seemed normal.

"What the hell kind of a uniform is that?" said Ben and Zav replied, "Major, AUS, assimilated rank, attached to General Eisenhower's SHAEF, public relations, sir." He saluted.

Ben laughed and said, "See you're doing OK, Zav," and Lang laughed and said, "They pour me in and out of assorted planes, jeeps, half-tracks and command cars, and I write write write like mad. I'm gonna write about *you* now. Anything you'd like to say for publication?"

"*Nada.*"

"Well, say it anyhow."

"Me cago en la leche."

"Do you still go to the same church?"

Ben nodded. "Same church, same pew. Except I'm not attending services for the duration."

"I can feel that story coming," said Zav. He looked around. "Anything you'd like to eat, drink? Courvoisier? Bisquit Dubouché? *Chateaubriand aux pommes soufflés? Champignons au beurre?*"

"Have you been to La Marmite lately?"

Zav shook his head sadly. "The whole waterfront is flat as a pancake. The invasion. Not a stick or stone or sailor's whore remains."

"How's Anne?" Ben said and could have bit his tongue, but Zav didn't notice.

"OK, I guess."

"Give her my best, will you?"

Zav nodded and said, "Excuse me for half an hour, will you, Ben? I want to file this story, then I'll be back and we'll talk about that time in Catalonia when you taught me to drink from a *porrón.*"

"Sure," said Ben, not caring whether he came back or not. Lang staggered slightly as he walked out of the ward.

14

July 30, 1948

United States of America v. *Ben Blau* went to the jury on Friday afternoon, and for the third time Ben was locked up in prison after court recessed.

The first night had been a bad one. He was on the second range in the cell block and he couldn't sleep; at least, he couldn't sleep soundly but inhabited for long hours that half-world between sleep and wakefulness that gives no rest at all.

We were going to get a marriage license this afternoon, he kept thinking, wondering where Sue was and what she was doing tonight. We would have been married on Saturday and what good would that have done, for that matter? The jury is going to convict and then you'd be in the can anyhow unless you could raise heavier bail and the expenses needed for an appeal.

In the half-waking, half-sleeping twilight of his mind, two tunes kept running, intertwining with each other. One was the melody

of the childhood jingle: *Tattle-tale, tattle-tale, hang 'im on a bull's tail* . . . The other was a song he had known in Spain: *Somos Comunistas, revolucionarios, que luchamos todos por la libertad* . . .

First one song would rise in his mind, then the other. *When the bull begins to pee, you will have a cup of tea,* his mind sang, and then it replied: *Queremos que cesen tantas injusticias, y que desaparesca la desigualdad* . . .

At one point in his reverie, when he was closest to sleep, the dream came again: there he was, lying rolled in his blanket on Hill 666; it was cold and the night was black.

Then he heard a voice saying, "Ben . . . Ben . . ." and sat up in his dream and out of the pitch-black night came Joe Faber, wearing a smile on his face and beckoning with one finger, saying, "Come . . . come . . ."

As always, he woke with a stifled scream and this time he banged his head on the bedspring over his head. He wondered for a moment whether he had waked his cell mate; then he remembered, there was no cell mate. The face of Levine, the blond, blue-eyed prisoner who had been in the next cell when he was there before, rose before his eyes and he wondered what had become of him.

Ay, ay, ay, his mind sang, *tirano borgés,*
Ay, ay, ay, que mal te vas a ver,
Ay, ay, ay, que viv' nuestra unión . . .
Somos Comunistas, hasta corazón!

On Thursday night he found out about Levine, for a blond, blue-eyed guy on the chow line spoke to him and said, "Remember me?"

Ben turned as they started marching down the clanging iron stairs and said. "How are you, *landsman?*"

"Great," said Levine, and grinned.

"You've been here a long time."

"I'm on my way to the Big Top next Tuesday," said Levine, and added, "Say, Blau, I want to apologize to you."

"For what?"

"For hard-timing you when you were here last February."

"Forget it," said Ben. "They hung it on you, huh?"

"Sure," said Levine.

"What'd you get?"

"Life."

"No crap," said Ben, shaking his head. They had reached the well of the cell block and the guard standing against the screening saw Ben talking and pointed his finger at him.

"You!" he said. "No talking!"

They did not talk at table but Levine passed his desert to Ben

and Ben accepted it with a smile, even though he didn't want it. The guy was obviously trying to make up to him and Ben was feeling depressed about him. Life. Good Christ, he thought, how do you do life in a penitentiary?

He recalled Nazim Hikmet, the Turkish revolutionary poet who had been in prison over fifteen years, and the even more spectacular story of the Polish poet whose name he couldn't remember, who had done twenty when the Red Army liberated him.

This man had been denied a pencil and paper for all the years he was inside, but he had composed and memorized an epic poem in those twenty years—over a hundred pages long—and when he was released, he calmly sat down and wrote the whole thing out!

On Friday in court, just before the jury went out, Sam gave him a note from Sue which said: "Courage, husband; we will come out of this OK. No matter what the jury has to say, we will raise the bail and have a couple years before you get to the Supreme Court, and a lot can happen between now and then, you Blue Man. Cheer up! Salud y cojones!" (Wonderful slip of the pen: *No matter what the jury has to say, we will raise the bail . . .!*)

Ben turned from the counsel table and smiled at her and she lifted her hand, placing the thumb and index finger together in a circle. He nodded his head.

The jury was out. How long would it be out? What would it say? Sam Tabatchnik had risen to peaks of real eloquence in his summation, Ben felt. The man worked like a beaver. He had run the gamut from cold, incisive logic that—to Ben—seemed to demolish the government's case beyond repair, to heights of sincere emotion that should have moved a stone.

Stop living in the past, Ben told himself. Stop living through Spain all over again and World War II. You must live in the present and the future. You must turn every day to account, even here. And if you *have* to do the five years, then you must utilize every day of it so that when you are released you will be stronger than when you were committed. You may have to be silent, but you need not be dead, as Levine will probably be dead for the rest of his natural life.

What was the poem Hikmet had smuggled out of prison? *Advice to a Fellow Prisoner.* (He remembered only a portion of it near the end).

Look at your face whenever you shave
forget your age,
protect yourself from lice
and from the spring evenings...
So it is not impossible to spend

ten, fifteen years in a cell
or even more,
it can be done—
Provided under your left breast
that precious gem
the jewelled heart stays bright.

The P.A. system said: "Hear this! Now hear this! Attention all units. Make your ten o'clock count. Make your ten o'clock count."

The lights in the cells went out and Ben lay staring at the bedspring over his head. The words of the Apostle, which he had been reading earlier that evening, ran through his mind:

Verliy, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal..."

"Do you believe that?" he said aloud, and simultaneously the screw's flashlight fell on him and the guard who had told him to stop talking said, "What're *you* gibbering about?"

"Nothing," said Ben, somewhat startled. "Just talking to myself."

"You ain't been in here long enough for that," said Holcomb, laughed and switched off his flashlight.

I believe it, and I don't believe it. Life eternal? What does that mean? The eternal life that such a man as Lenin lives in the minds and hearts of millions throughout the world, or Shakespeare or Jesus? Yes, but Judas tattle-tale loved his life and he is remembered, too, even though he hanged himself. But who would remember him except for his betrayal of the revolutionary carpenter of Galilee?

Now is my soul troubled, wrote the Apostle, *and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour! but for this cause came I unto this hour . . .*

Cut it out, Ben said to himself and closed his eyes. Now you're beginning to equate yourself with Christ himself! You're not going to your death. What's five years in prison between friends? . . .

On Saturday morning the guy in the next cell hammered on the iron plates and when Ben got close to the wall, the guy said, "Grab it."

Ben stuck his arm out and felt a folded newspaper placed into his hand and rapidly withdrew it. To his astonishment and delight it was a copy of *The Daily Worker.* The guy next door said, "Levine sent it," and Ben said, "Thanks."

BLAU JURY OUT! the banner said and Ben read Dave Ben-

nett's by-lined story for a few minutes before the whistle blew for chow. He passed Levine on the line and said, "Thanks, pal," and Levine grinned and said, "See you in the yard."

That afternoon they had two hours in the cinder-covered yard that was surrounded by high brick walls. It was hot as hell and the heat bounced and re-echoed off the walls as though an enormous magnifying glass were focussed on the yard.

Levine organized a soft-ball game and asked Ben to play first base. He was sitting on the gravel near the wall and shook his head. "Too damn hot," he said. "How can you do it?"

"Gotta keep yourself fit," said Levine. "Gotta keep yourself in shape." He had a pair of bats in his hands and was warming up with them.

"You're a better man than I am," Ben said with a grin. "I'd keel over."

"Nah," said Levine. "You get used to it. It'll be a hell of a lot hotter in Leavenworth, where I'm going, than it is here. Jury still out?"

"That's what the radio said this morning," said Ben.

Up on the wall the guard Holcomb was standing next to the man who was on duty with the .30-06 rifle, and he nodded toward the yard.

"Keep an eye peeled," he said to the rifle-guard. "You may see a sight for sore eyes."

"Whattaya mean?" said the other man, but Holcomb didn't answer.

The two officers stood watching the yard and Ben sat on the ground about six feet from the wall, where there was a sign that read: INMATES WILL STAY AT LEAST SIX FEET FROM THE WALL. How the hell anyone could climb it was a question that amused the guys who read it.

"I used to be pretty good at this," Levine was saying, swinging the two bats. "Watch this, Blau."

Ben looked up and Levine swung the two bats high in the air and brought them down on Ben's head. There was an amazingly loud crunching sound and immediately Levine dropped the bats and started to shout.

"I killed the bastard!" he yelled. "I killed the dirty Red son of a bitch!"

Some guys who had seen this started running toward the door that led into the prison. Others stood still. A few moved toward the loudly shouting man.

Two screws came running from across the yard. Levine was standing with his arms extended, screaming, "Time off for good

behavior! They gotta gimme good-time for this! They *gotta* gimme good-time!"

The guards reached Levine and grabbed him and two others came running from the building itself and ordered all the inmates indoors immediately. They started to move sluggishly.

"What you do that for, you crazy bastard?" said one of the officers holding Levine.

"He's nothin' but a Commie," said Levine.

They started to haul Levine, handcuffed by now, toward the prison and Levine was laughing and shouting, "You watch! You'll see! I'll be sprung for this! I'm *tellin'* ya!"

The two extra guards ordered four of the inmates to pick Blau up and take him to the prison hospital.

Up on the wall the rifle-guard was looking at Holcomb with his mouth open. "How'd you know?" he said.

"Two less Jew-boys," Holcomb said.

15

July 14, 1946

The invitation which reached Ben a week and a half after it was written, said there would be a house warming party at the Langs' new apartment at One University Place, and the tri-color of France decorated the front cover of the printed invitation, for the party was to be held on Bastille Day. What the point of that was, Zav hadn't said in his scribbled note, which read: *Don't know where the hell you are, but hope this reaches you in time.*

As he walked to University Place from the furnished room, the heat of the mid-summer night was oppressive and his spirits were low. New York seemed to get hotter every summer and dingier every day. What the hell am I going to Lang's party for? he asked himself. We have nothing in common. What's Lang to me or I to Lang that I should come when he whistles? Or do I really have a hankering for the fleshpots and a yen to become one of the little brothers of the rich?

The only answer that came to mind was the simple and direct one: I'm lonely. Even at thirty-six, he thought, you haven't become self-reliant enough to stay alone when you don't want to be alone. How long does it take to get that way?

One University Place wasn't so swank a locale for Lang, but

the apartment itself was more lavish than its shell. A maid met him at the door and he didn't have a hat to hand to her, not even a Panama.

Lang was holding forth in the center of the living room floor, a snifter of brandy in hand. He lifted the glass and cried, "Hail, the Conquering Hero Comes!" and broke into the *Marseillaise.*

Ben caught a glimpse of Clem Elliman sitting in the corner with a long-legged blonde with a spectacular bosom, holding a glass in his hand, too. Clem had covered the CBI during the war, Ben remembered. A shortish, heavy-set woman with a string of pearls about eight feet long was sitting on the divan next to Anne Lang, and Zav took Ben by the arm and escorted him across the room.

"Willie," he said, "I want you to meet the only intelligent Communist in captivity, Ben Blau. Wilhelmina Patton, the Latter-Day Cassandra, the American Voice of Doom."

Ben had recognized her face, though it was much more dilapidated than the half-column cut that ran with her column, and he bowed to her as she had not put out her hand.

"That's quite a build-up," Miss Patton said. Her tones had once been described as "pear-shaped," and she had never forgotten it. She was reputed to be the highest-paid platform personality in the country. "I see that I'll have to take you apart, young man," she said.

"At your service," said Ben with a grin and took Anne Lang's hand. She looked worried, he noticed, and he obeyed an impulse and kissed her hand. She blushed.

"*What* a bourgeois custom," said Wilhelmina Patton and uttered the laugh that had been compared to a running brook.

Zav took Ben to Clem and his girl friend, and he shook hands with both. "The unsinkable Comrade Blau," said Clem. "I see you've given up writing for fighting—for good."

"I didn't give it up," said Ben. "It gave *me* up."

Clem turned to his girl friend and said, "He tossed up a correspondent's job in Spain to join the Brigade." The girl friend looked at Ben and crinkled her nose.

Then Lang lost interest in introducing Ben further and he introduced himself to a young man and a pretty girl with enormously long eyelashes who sat next to him and was called Sue Menken.

Lang was hanging over the Capehart and suddenly the amplified opening notes of *Die Thaelmann-Kolonne* flooded the room and drowned all conversation.

Ben looked at Zav and Zav lifted his glass and shouted, "In honor of our permanent revolutionary comrade Blau!" He drank,

then suddenly remembering, poured another drink and rushed across the room with it and handed it to Ben.

"May you live forever," he said.

Ben lifted the glass and said, "*L'Chaim.*"

"What's that mean?"

"Yiddish. To life," said Ben.

"*L'Chaim,*" said Lang reflectively, tasting the words. "That's good. I like that. *L'Chaim.*" He looked at Ben. "How would you say, To death?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," said Ben.

"*Die Heimat ist weit,*" sang the authentic voice of the Thaelmann Battalion, "*doch wir sind bereit... wir kampfen und siegen fur dich...*" ....

"*Frei-HEIT!*" boomed Lang and Elliman together, drowning out the phonograph.

Some more people arrived and Ben found himself sitting alone watching the guests and listening to the broken scraps of conversation. What the hell did I come for? he asked himself again. These are not my people. And what if they're not? Do you have to indulge in incest *all* the time and associate only with your own kind? Why don't you talk to these people? They're *people,* aren't they?

He looked at the young girl named Sue and admired her for a moment. She was cute as a bug and animated, too. Her escort was listening to everything that Lang and Patton and Elliman were saying, and nodding his head automatically like a bird in a coo-coo clock. Ben decided to put Sue Menken out of mind. She was previously engaged, he figured.

Then he saw Wilhelmina Patton advancing upon him from across the room, and rose politely. She gave the impression of a battleship under way, though her moderate displacement certainly did not justify the impression.

"How are you, comrade?" she said and looked at him quizzically.

"Fine,'" he said.

"You look like a fish out of water," she said. She waved one arm in an extravagant gesture. "This is the *haute bourgeoisie.*"

"They're just people," said Ben, echoing what his mind had said to him earlier.

"You don't say?" said Wilhelmina. "How kind of you. I should have thought you'd consider us candidates for liquidation."

Ben grinned. "You're making hostility with me, as Zav would say."

"Not at all," Wilhelmina rippled. "You know, Mr. Blau, I once had a secretary who was a Communist, but she wouldn't cotton to me. Didn't trust me, I guess. The employer-employee relationship,

no doubt, or something worse. *She* probably regarded me as a candidate for the firing squad."

Ben was about to say something but Patton kept right on.

"Of course," she said, "I sacked her as soon as I had substantial evidence that she was an organized Red. The FBI informed me."

"Why?" said Ben. "Didn't she do her work well?"

"Perfectly," said Patton. "A demon of efficiency and an expert research assistant in the bargain. But I naturally couldn't trust her."

"Why not?"

"Let it go," she said, then as an afterthought, "but, of course, I have confidential documents, some from governmental sources that must remain confidential."

"I see," said Ben.

Others noticed that Patton was bending Ben's ear and began to drift in their direction. The woman had what used to be called animal magnetism, there was no doubt of that.

"We must understand each other," she said to Ben. "I'm the daughter of a poor country teacher. Poor as a church mouse. I know what it is to be hungry. I hold no brief for the evils of this system. I know it from top to bottom."

"That's a good beginning," said Ben with a bright smile.

"Tell me," she said to Ben, "do you really believe what you're told about the Soviet Union?"

Ben smiled and said, "Be more specific, Miss Patton. That was a catch-all question. Tell me what I'm *told* to believe, one point at a time, and I'll answer you."

"*Aha!*" shouted Lang, who was hovering in the background and teetering slightly. "The battle is joined. *This* I must hear!" He hauled up a chair and sat down in it as though he intended to stay there for life.

"Do you believe they have socialism and that it's a good thing?"

"That's two questions," said Ben. "The answer is, Yes, both times."

"How do you know what's true about the Soviet Union and what's false?"

Ben laughed. "How do you know anything, Miss Patton? I know it's good because any society that prevents the exploitation of man by man is bound to be better than one that perpetuates its opposite."

Patton looked up and addressed the assembled multitude. "The man is cute," she said. "He speaks in epigrams. The Marxist La Rochefoucauld!"

"Allons, enfants de la patrie," sang Zav, *"le jour de gloire est arrivé!"*

"Shut up, Zav," said Patton, and he replied, "Happy Bastille Day to you, too."

She turned to Ben and said, "Have you ever been there?"

"Have you ever been to Korea?" said Ben.

"No."

"Do you believe it's impossible for you to know anything about Korea, for that reason?"

"Well, I . . ."

"It's possible to read," said Ben, "and it's possible to meet people who've been there, and it's possible to tell a liar from an honest man."

"Certainly, but . . ."

"Patton's outpointed!" shouted Clem Elliman, standing behind Zav's chair with one long arm around his girl friend, one hand on her large right breast and his red beard resting kittenishly on her shoulder.

"Why is the Soviet Union the only country in the world it's impossible to know anything about?" said Ben, and Patton thrust out her chin and said, "Let me get a word in edgewise, will you?"

"Hear! hear!" cried Zav. "The millennium has arrived!"

"I asked a question, and you didn't answer it," said Wilhelmina. "Have you ever *been* there?"

"No."

"I have," she said. "I lived there."

"So?" said Ben. "What didn't you like? The plumbing at the Metropol Hotel?"

"Don't be facetious."

"I'm not. But you forget I've read *you,* too, Miss Patton, and from what I've read of you I'd be very suspicious of anything you *did* like."

"On the button!" shouted Elliman. "The challenger has drawn claret! The champ's rocking on her feet, the champ's staggering, the champ's down!"

Patton looked up at Clem and said, "Stick to your blonde and your Irish whiskey, Clem." She smiled benignly on the young lady and said, "No offense, darling. You're the loveliest thing in this modern Sodom and Gomorrah."

"Patton, the Voice of Doom," said Zav, looking into his brandy glass, which was empty. *"Contre nous, de la tyrannie, l'étendard sanglant est levé!"*

"What about the purges?" said Patton.

"What about them?"

"Do you actually believe the propaganda put out by the Stalinists--that all these men, leaders of the October Revolution, were traitors?"

"Possible," said Ben.

Patton burst into laughter and addressed Lang. "I thought you said he was intelligent. He's just like all the rest."

"Lead on, MacDuff," said Lang, "and damned be he, or is it him . . ."

When Patton had finally stopped laughing, Ben said with a grin, "What's so funny? Did you ever hear of Judas?"

"Ridiculous," said Patton.

"Why ridiculous? He was one of the Disciples, wasn't he?"

Patton angrily fingered her pearls as though she were telling a rosary and said, "Your answer's both Jesuitical and sacrilegious."

"Is treason something that's confined to the Soviet Union?" said Ben. "Did you ever hear of Benedict Arnold?"

"Certainly. I'm not illiterate."

"He was one of Washington's righthand men before he sold out, wasn't he?"

"That's different," said Patton.

"Is it?" said Ben. "Franco and his aides all swore allegiance to the Spanish Republic. Have you forgotten Quisling or Marshal Pétain?"

Patton said, "Did you ever *know* Kamenev, Karl Radek, Bukharin, Rykov or Tomsky? Did you meet Pyatakov, Tukhachevsky or Krestinsky?"

"Obviously not."

"Well," said Patton, heaving an enormous sigh, "*I* did. I knew them intimately. And anyone who ever met those men would know instantly that they could *never* have been traitors. You said it yourself. You can tell an honest man from a liar."

She rose as though she were the Queen of England and had said, "The audience is at an end," and Anne Lang went with her to the bedroom where she freshened up before leaving.

"*That* for you," said Lang, whose head was swaying slightly on his neck. "Ah, Santa Maria de los Dolores," he said.

"What, again?" said Elliman, who had already signaled his blonde (by a pinch on the right buttock) that the time had come to leave.

"Stay me with flagons," said Lang tragically, "comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love." He held up one finger. "That's Solomon, a Jew."

Elliman roared and squeezed the blonde's right nipple so hard she squealed. "I know one worth two of that," Clem shouted.

"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but *not* for love. That's Shakespeare. A *goy!*"

The young girl named Sue suddenly sat down on the couch next to Ben and took out a cigarette. He reached to the coffee table and picked up a book of matches engrossed with the initials F.X.L. and lit her cigarette.

"I don't suppose I could see you home," he heard himself saying in a low voice, and she smiled.

"Not tonight."

"Are you in the phone book?"

"I am," she said. "And I work at I. Klein in the outsize frock department. No cracks."

Anne and Patton returned to the living room at this point and Wilhelmina sailed right over to Ben, who suddenly felt small and defenceless on the sofa.

"Young man," she said, "what about the Duclos letter?"

"Don't hit me," said Ben. "I didn't write it."

"But you approve of the flipflop your comrades performed—and you performed with them?"

"I never did," said Ben. "I was in the Army at the time, so . . ."

"I'll bet you kids had a field day in the Army," Patton interrupted. "Learning how to overthrow the government by force and violence—at government expense!"

"It was duck soup," said Ben with a grin. "Especially the way we pulled the wool over Major-General Bissell's eyes."

"Who he?" said Elliman.

"G-2," said Ben. "They had him up before a Congressional committee last year, trying to find out how come a few of the Lincoln vets got commissions." He turned to Patton. "Know what the old fool said?"

"What?"

"He said, 'These officers have shown by their deeds that they are upholding the United States by force and violence.' "

"You didn't answer my question," she said.

"You didn't give me a chance," said Ben. "I told you, I wasn't a member at the time, but I never approved of the first flipflop, if you want to call it that—dissolving the party. And I've discovered since that Bill Foster never did either."

"But you support the *new* line of the party, just as you support the purges and anything else you're told to support."

"You know, Miss Patton," said Ben, "if you weren't obviously a lady, I'd begin to suspect that you were slightly insulting."

"But you approve of Stalin's betrayal of the revolution, don't you? You're all conditioned, like Comrade Pavlov's dogs."

"Touché!" the young man with Sue Menken suddenly said and Ben glanced at him. Sue had a slight frown on her face.

"I really don't understand you," Ben said to Patton.

"Willie," said Lang, "I forbid you t' insult my guests. This man's an authentic hero. He was a hero in Spain, hero in Germany. I know. Saw 'im fight. Saw 'im wounded. Saw 'im die. Saw 'im resurrected like the everliving Christ. Blau, the Iron Man."

He got up from the chair with difficulty and fiddled around with the Capehart. The regular beat and melody of *Meadowland* was heard from the concealed loudspeakers.

"None of this Red Army trash, Zav," said Patton, with the Voice of Command.

"It's *music,"* said Lang, advancing from the machine.

"Frank," said Anne Lang.

"Don' tell me anything about music," said Lang. "I'm an *authority* on music, from Palestrina t' Aaron Copland. This is *good* music an' if you're not careful I'll play both the In'ernational *and* The Comintern, both of which 're *very* good music."

"Well, *tovarich,"* said Patton. "Answer my question."

"I can't, Miss Patton," Ben said, noting out of the corner of his eyes that Sue Menken and her escort were saying goodnight to Anne Lang. "I'll tell you why. You've got us coming and going.

"You hated the Russian Revolution and everything it stood for, but now you say Stalin betrayed it and you weep crocodile tears over Bukharin, Radek and the rest.

"When the Soviets shot Tukhachevsky and the others, you said they'd killed all their best generals. Did you apologize when history made a fool of you?

"When the party fights for Negro rights, you say we're exploiting the Negro people, but I never see *your* kind taking any effective action. You're content to talk.

"On the one hand, you say the Communists are a sinister international conspiracy—diabolically clever and enormously influential. On the other, you say we're a tiny handful of inconsequential morons.

"When you're with fascists, you're a radical. When you're with radicals, you're a reactionary. You'll use any stick to beat a dog so long as the dog is red . . ."

"Now just a minute," said Wilhelmina.

"No, Miss Patton," said Ben. "Either you take a principled position or you take none. If I were a capitalist I'd fight like hell to defend my right to profit by the labor of others, but *you're* a chameleon. You blow hot and cold at the same time.

"If you want to argue against socialism, then take the capitalist

position and defend it. Don't berate capitalism and then say socialism's worse. It couldn't be."

Wilhelmina Patton smiled. "Mr. Blau," she said, "You're very cute. I mean no offense. You will be a martyr to the *Rav*olution. They will bury you in the walls of I. Klein. I get heated arguing my principles, just as you do. But the time's coming very soon when the American people will get sick of your kind and regurgitate it!"

Her face was red, and she handled her pearls with amazing rapidity and dexterity. "I tell you now, America will *fight* the Soviet Union, but before she does she'll scour the land of every Communist and put you all where you belong!"

Ben grinned. "I mean no offense either, Miss Patton, I assure you. But you sound exactly like some Nazi prisoners I interviewed in Germany last year before I got clipped."

"Goodnight," said Patton, kissing Anne's cheek.

"Goodnight," Sue Menken and her escort said to Ben.

"'night," said Lang, unable to rise from his chair. "Happy Bastille Day to you all. Heads will roll! *Marchons, marchons, qu'un sang impur, abreuve nos sillons!*"

"Anne," said Clem Elliman, "you better keep a short leash on Zav when you get to Hollywood. Or he'll cut a wide swathe among all those moving pitcher bitches."

There was an uncomfortable silence. Patton and the others were gone.

"What're you going to Hollywood for?" said Ben, more to Anne than to Lang.

"Money," said Zav. *"Gold!* yellow, glittering, precious gold!..."

"Zav," said Ben. "Did Patton live in the Soviet Union?"

"No," he said, then corrected himself. "Oh, maybe six weeks, on one of those Intourist junkets, *you* know."

"Did she know Karl Radek and those other guys, intimately?"

"She was prob'ly introduced to 'em," said Zav. "Why?"

"And you sat there," Ben said indignantly, "and let her get away with all that crap?"

Zav lifted his eyebrows as though they weighed a ton. "My dear Benjamin," he said, "anyone who's known Willie as long as I've known Willie, knows that you don't argue with Willie."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, she *b'lieves* she lived in the Soviet Union. She *b'lieves* she knew Radek an' Kamenev an' Bukharin, in'imately."

Ben stood up and said, "I'm ashamed of you."

Anne said, "Let him alone, Ben." But Ben deliberately ignored her.

"I'm ashamed of myself," said Zav. "Always *have* been."

"You've been a man of principle," said Ben. "I know. I knew you when. I've read your stuff for years. You really know what the score is. What the hell are you *doing* to yourself, anyhow? Why do you play around with that fascist bitch? Why do you offer her the hospitality of your home and let people who don't know any better listen to this crap?"

"'s a free country," said Zav, "ain' it?"

He looked up at Ben, then at Anne, who was now standing in front of him. "Ain' it a free country, Annie-pie?" There were tears in his eyes.

"I was in a free country, once, Spain. Now *that* was a free country. Free *people*. Won'erful, *beaut*'ful people. Maria de los Dolores. Dolores de los Dolores."

Ben glanced at Anne but her face was expressionless. He looked at Zav. Zav was looking at Ben, ignoring Anne's presence.

"D' I ever tell you 'bout Dolores de los Dolores? Dead. Squashed flat. Air-raid on Madrid. *Asesinos! Criminales!* Mos' beaut'ful girl 'n Spain. Like you, Ben. *Roja. Rojo.*"

He tried to stand up, slumped back in the chair.

"I'll help you to bed," said Ben and Anne nodded to him. They lifted Zav by both arms, got him onto his feet.

Lang fell into a deep sleep immediately and Ben covered him with a quilted coverlet and returned to the living room where Anne was sitting in an armchair. She looked up. "I'm sorry," she said.

"What's really eating him, Anne?" he said and she clasped her hands in her lap.

"So many things," she said. "Our marriage, which has been a mistake from the beginnnig. I wanted to marry him. I don't think he really wanted to marry me, but he felt, Oh what the hell, we like each other and I've slept with so many women, and Annie's a nice girl and she loves me and understands me."

"It must be more than that," said Ben.

"Oh, it is," said Anne, and he noticed that she was dry-eyed and spoke impersonally, as though she were talking about someone with whom she was not in the least connected.

"It's his childhood, I suppose, and the guilt he still feels about leaving the Church, and the conflict between his political ideas and his desire to live well, and the fact that he can't write a first-rate poetic drama no matter how he tries."

"I feel much worse about you, Anne," Ben said.

"I know," she said. "You shouldn't. He's really, deep down inside of him a good man, a talented man, a kind man."

"Yes and no," said Ben. "Nobody's a victim of circumstance. Everybody has choices in this world and he has to take them and the responsibility that goes with them. Does that sound smug?"

"Yes," she said, then smiled. "But I'm his wife, after all, and I tend to make allowances for him, excuses. I'm beginning to understand the meaning of Saint Paul's words about faith, hope and charity—'but the greatest of these is charity'. But I don't know how much more of this I can take."

Ben said, "I must go. If there's ever anything I can do to help you . . ."

Anne looked up but didn't rise. "Thanks, Ben," she said. "I know you would."

16

Polyclinic Hospital,
345 West 50th Street,
New York City.
August 3, 1948

Dearest Sue: I have what is ridiculously called a splitting headache, but I've had it so long now that it's as much a part of me as the brand-new silver calvarium the aptly-named sawbones have installed.

It's wonderful to know that in a week they will let you visit me. It would be wonderful if I could tell you what went on in my little head during the three weeks I was doing what newspapermen always call "hovering between life and death."

I can't. Because I remember nothing except the image of Levine standing over me with the bats. I seem to remember that you once said I could never see anything wrong in people without being hit over the head with a baseball bat. Well, I've been hit. The doctors say my cerebrum will be as good as ever, which isn't much to look forward to, is it?

This, of course, is a minor miracle. Also a miracle—or better described, a fluke—is the mistrial that resulted from the ironic fact that I had the constitutional right and duty to be present in court when the jury returned, and wasn't able to attend.

As you've undoubtedly been told by Sam, this will mean another trial and the only thing we can be reasonably certain of is that Zav won't testify. But I have no doubt the *Federal Bureau of Intimida-*

tion and the *Department of Injustice* will be able to find a burglar-proof witness who will swear he overheard me in a Spanish *retrete,* conspiring with Josef V. Dzugashvili (better known as Staleen), as to how I and the 1,200 Americans who came out of Spain alive would take over the Pentagon—which hadn't been built at the time.

Miss Sharpe, the beautiful nurse who is taking this down longhand, is looking bored, so I'll try to make it short. (Miss Sharpe says she isn't bored and isn't beautiful, but don't you believe it.)

I've been relatively conscious for more than a week and a half now, and it occurs to me that after the next trial is held and I'm convicted, it's *most* unlikely that I'll be saved from a 5-year stretch in the pen by another conk on the head by another Levine.

If this sounds gloomy, the curious fact is that I'm not the least bit depressed. It's just that people like us are obliged to understand the world in which we live and not be taken by surprise when unpleasant things occur.

But every daily paper reveals the lovely fact that the world is moving step by step toward socialism, and this is what makes me feel so cheerful, Blau that I am (meaning blue).

Zav would say I'm a dupe (though he knows better) and Patton would say I'm a foreign agent (she knows better, too) and the chairman of the Committee would say I'm a traitor, though I doubt if he'd know a traitor if he looked in his shaving mirror. However.

It may look like a bad time for us—for you and me and all decent Americans—but it's not. There's an old Spanish proverb you and I should adopt as our very own: *Si este sea una noche del destino benedición para ella hasta que llegue la aurora.* (If this be a night of destiny, blessed be it till comes the dawn.)

Comes the Dawn, Sue, but in no Hollywood motion picture fable. Comes the dawn for Sue and Blue. I saw it in your eyes as I sat on the stand and tried to say what I believed in. I saw in it your face that day we were at lunch.

Do you like Spanish proverbs? I have a silver calvarium full of them. Here's another: *A smile is worth more than a peseta.* And another: *My jewel is my weapon, my rest is to fight, my bed the hard stones; my dream—to banish sleep.*

This last was sung by the guerrilla fighters who operated behind Franco's lines during the war and are still there. It's one we must take to heart and hang on the wall of our home. We must *all* banish sleep until love is born into the world alive and a smile is worth even more than the Almighty American Dollar.

If I could get away with it I'd say: if it is thought necessary to speak of sacred things, then the one sacred thing is the dissatisfaction of man with himself and his striving to be better than he is;

sacred is his hatred of all the trivial rubbish which he himself has created; sacred is his desire to do away with greed, envy, crime, disease and war, and all enmity between men on earth; and sacred is his labor.

I can't say it because if I did you'd recognize it as Gorky without the quotation marks. So I say this instead:

No man can truly love his fellow man (his class) until he can have a complete relationship with another human being. And, by the same token, no man or woman can have a complete relationship with another human being until he loves his class. These are opposites. They are also identical.

I gave you a bad time for a whole year after we met at Zav's because something decent in me told me that I had not yet grown up to you—who have been a working girl since you were fourteen. I gave you a bad time because I could not give you what you needed. I didn't have it to give. All the "trivial rubbish" had not been cleared away.

I don't ask you to believe it's all gone now—at least until you see me next week and flap those fantastic eyelashes at me and I hold your magic hand. But I'm praying that when you come into the room you will see that the two halves of me have finally become one whole: the political man and the human being.

For as long as the enemy will permit it, I want us to be quiet together, to love each other, to feed each other with our love, to give what we can to those around us. And I want us to absorb the love that is flooding over the earth today from the millions fighting for final liberation from hatred and oppression.

From China to Spain ordinary people are in motion and the intensity of their motion is reshaping the world before our very eyes. And having seen what they were capable of in Spain, having enjoyed the love of the Joe Fabers, the Hank Pratts and the Emilio Costas, having seen, even in prison, the immediate impulse toward *kindliness* and *comradeship* that exists among those deprived of liberty, I know that the baseball bat wielded by Levine, the machine-guns of Franco and even the atomic bomb beloved of the Pentagon are impotent against them.

That is why I can say today, if you can accept a man with a silver skull, I will never call myself Ben the Blue again. I will release poor Miss Sharpe now, who will promptly wash from her mind all the bilge I've poured over her (*Never!* G. S.).

And I will sign myself, dearest wife, lover and comrade, now and forever, Ben the Red*

* the color of life itself.

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